

THE GIFT
OF CORRESPONDENCE
IN CLASSICAL ROME



FRIENDSHIP IN CICERO'S *Ad Familiares*
AND
SENECA'S *Moral Epistles*

AMANDA WILCOX

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TO CHRIS, BEN, AND NICK

Extra fortunam est quidquid donatur amicis:
quas dederis, solas semper habebis opes.

Whatever you give to your friends is beyond fortune's power.
The only wealth you will always have is what you have given away.

—MARTIAL, *Epigrams* 5.42.7–8



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INTRODUCTION

Artemon, the editor of Aristotle's letters, says one should write a letter in the same manner as a dialogue. For a letter is like one's own part in a dialogue. There is perhaps something in what he says, but not the whole story; the letter should be somewhat more studied than the dialogue, for the latter imitates someone speaking off the cuff, but the former is written and sent as a kind of gift.

—DEMETRIUS, "On Style," 4.223–224

In recent years, scholarly attention to the study of Roman correspondence has greatly increased. But our understanding of the complex cultural location of letters, poised as they are at the intersection of literature, communication, and practice, remains incomplete. So too does our understanding of their power to shape relationships, policies, and the *personae* their authors hoped to promote, both among their contemporaries and for posterity. This study takes the Hellenistic rhetorician Demetrius's characterization of letters as "a kind of gift" as its inspiration and as a limited license for applying modern anthropological notions of the gift to ancient letters. When applied to Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiares* and Seneca's *Epistulae morales*, theory of the gift and gift exchange not only proves illuminating but also provides a *via media* for interpreting works whose understanding has often been hampered by the limits of other scholarly approaches, whether literary or historical. The first part of this study explicates the unwritten rules of late republican Roman epistolary rhetoric and practice by examining euphemism and related tactics in Cicero's correspondence. The



second part shows how Seneca's philosophical letters to Lucilius deliberately broke and reimagined these rules. As disparate as the two authors are, Seneca's transformation of epistolary rhetoric from an instrument of social negotiation to a mode for philosophy and self-reflection, along with his radical reimagination of Roman friendship, can be evaluated best when we view his *Epistulae morales* as equally inheriting and reacting against the euphemistic rhetoric and social practices enabled by and exemplified in Cicero's familiar correspondence.

Cicero, Seneca, and Roman Prose Letters

This book does not attempt to track the development of Roman prose epistolography. It does examine the works of two preeminent practitioners of that form, however, and is greatly concerned with exploring how the letters of Seneca, the later author, engage with the paradigmatic correspondence of the earlier, Cicero. Therefore it may help to start out with a brief comment on the role of letters in the oeuvre and career of each of these men, and on their respective places in Roman political and cultural history.

Members of the Roman ruling class must have written letters to one another from a very early period.¹ But the extant correspondence of Marcus Tullius Cicero with his acquaintances and associates, his brother Quintus and other family members, and his longtime friend and confidant Titus Pomponius Atticus, a correspondence whose letters date from 68 to 43 BC, is our best and most extensive source of evidence for classical Roman epistolary rhetoric and practice. And yet is unlikely that Cicero represents an average letter-writer of the late republic. Even among men with similar education, tastes, ambition, and achievements, the rhetorical scope and power of his letters must be exceptional. Cicero was a new man, the first of his family to reach the consulship, and of necessity he leaned even more heavily on the power of words to construct, advance, and sustain his persona and career than did those of his associates who could rely on patrician pedigrees and on networks of familial relationships closely woven over centuries.² Other scholars have described how, over the course of his career, Cicero fashioned an ever-evolving persona through his oratory, rhetoric, and philosophical works. This self-fashioning is equally evident in his correspondence. Cicero was an exceptionally diligent and gifted correspondent, and his letters offer us a veritable catalogue of the various types of letter regularly composed and exchanged by elite Roman men. They also provide a wealth of clues to understanding practices of epistolary composition, circulation, and publication.³

Cicero's corpus could readily illustrate nearly all the forty-one styles of letter enumerated by the fourth-century rhetorical work "On Letter Form" attributed

to Libanius.⁴ But, unsurprisingly, all but the briefest of Cicero's letters fall into the "mixed" category, in which the writer uses many styles, rather than being restricted solely to advice, encouragement, reproach, blame, reporting, or praising, to name several of Libanius's "allegedly separable" types.⁵ Cicero's letters certainly all partake of a fundamental characteristic identified by Demetrius—namely, acting as a substitute for conversation. And although very few of Cicero's letters would admit of categorization by their consistency of style, a fair number may be categorized by their dominant purpose. In the chapters that follow, I devote particular attention to two of these types: letters that console their addressees and letters of recommendation. However, the essential function of Cicero's letters, more crucial if not more basic than imparting news, was creating, maintaining, advertising, deepening, and extending relationships, sometimes all at the same time.⁶

All together, the extant collections *Ad Atticum*, *Ad Quintum fratrem*, *Ad Brutum*, and *Ad familiares* preserve 861 complete letters written to or by Cicero, dating from the year 68 to 43 BC, the year of his death.⁷ It has become standard practice for editors to present Cicero's letters in restored chronological order, rather than by their traditional arrangement into books grouped by addressee. Because my main purpose in the first half of this study is to illuminate the social nature of Ciceronian correspondence, and particularly the nature of epistolary rhetoric, I rely on D. R. Shackleton Bailey's chronological arrangement of the letters, which makes the back and forth of *amicitia* waged through correspondence much more visible than do the traditional books. Yet Mary Beard recently has demonstrated the insights to be gained from redirecting attention to the traditional order of letters within books as well as to the traditional book divisions of the *Ad familiares* and *Ad Atticum*. The sequence of letters within books can have significant effect on the emphasis of certain letters, and a close reading of the letters in their traditional sequence helps to reveal the thematic emphases that chronological arrangements destroy.⁸ Smaller units of letters grouped by addressee may also reveal narratives and themes, as with a series of letters in *Ad familiares* 4 addressed to and written by Marcus Claudius Marcellus.⁹ In these letters, Cicero consoles Marcellus for the defeat of the Pompeian party and urges him to accept Caesar's clemency and return to Rome. Editorial design seems most apparent at the juncture of *Fam.* 4.11 [232] and 4.12 [253], when our expectations are given a wrench. *Fam.* 4.12 is addressed to Cicero by Servius Sulpicius Rufus, and it offers a brief but dramatic account of Marcellus's assassination in Athens just as he was returning to Rome, having finally yielded to Cicero's urging that he do so. In the traditional arrangement, Marcellus's thanks to Cicero for supporting his cause come immediately before the notice of his death. This arrangement heightens the surprise of his tragic end and creates



dramatic irony that is lost when chronological order is restored.¹⁰ Accordingly, throughout the chapters of this book based on the *Ad familiares*, I have tried to be alert to the possibilities of narrative reading that reveal the literary craftsmanship of the collection's ancient editor or editors.

Who collected, edited, and published Cicero's letters, and when, remains a matter for speculation, as does the question of how Cicero would have arranged the letters for publication, had he survived to do so.¹¹ But the evidence that Cicero himself considered publication of an edited selection of his letters is clear. In a letter to Atticus from July 44, he writes, "There is no collection of my letters, but Tiro has about seventy, and I must gather some up from you. I have to inspect and correct them; then, finally, they will be published." (Mearum epistularum nulla est συνγωγή; sed habet Tiro instar septuaginta, et quidem sunt a te quaedam sumendae. Eas ego oportet perspiciam, corrigam; tum denique edentur, *Att.* 16.5.5 [410].) In a letter to Tiro, he jokes about an odd word choice in Tiro's previous letter by speculating about the motive behind this attempt at lofty style: "I see what you are up to—you too want your letters copied onto rolls." (Video quid agas: tuas quoque epistulas vis referri in volumina, *Fam.* 16.17.1 [186].) In the event, death must have intervened before Cicero completed the project.

Written slightly over a century after the letters of Cicero, the *Epistulae morales* of Lucius Annaeus Seneca were composed at the end of their author's life, sometime between his retirement from public duties as *amicus principis* in AD 62 and his death in 65.¹² They are probably his final work, and have been seen as the culmination of his philosophical oeuvre, an attempt to sum up and to pass on Stoic instruction in how to live well that is more diffusely communicated in his other philosophical writing, and less directly addressed or even absent in his dramatic works.¹³ The *Moral Epistles* have also been read as a final effort at the moral reform of Nero, once Seneca's pupil, whose reign was growing increasingly absolute, cruel, and unpredictable.¹⁴ It is generally agreed among scholars that they are not "real" letters, in the sense that Cicero's correspondence is.¹⁵ In any case, the transformation of Rome's government in the century following the death of Cicero forms a significant backdrop for the literary ambitions and philosophical motivations of Seneca's collection. His more-or-less imaginary construction of an honorable withdrawal from public life entailed a radical reenvisioning of *amicitia*.¹⁶ Letter writing, which was one among several traditional means for practicing Ciceronian friendship, becomes a fully sufficient vehicle for Senecan friendship, requiring neither actual exchange nor a real addressee to perform its function.

Letters, moreover, made it possible for Seneca to learn and practice philosophy even as he wrote about it. The letters to Lucilius dramatize the Stoic

practice of self-examination (*meditatio* or *askesis*), and enable Seneca's claim to usefulness—he writes that he is prescribing remedies for posterity (*Ep.* 8.1)—while nonetheless preserving his detachment (or creating an impression of detachment) from the woes of the past and fearful anticipation of the future. Moreover, letters enable action at a distance. Seneca remains engaged in communication with his friend, and since Lucilius is a friend, and since Seneca's letters retain their formal identity as social instruments, even in retirement Seneca remains visibly involved in benefitting his fellow men.¹⁷ At the same time, the physical separation that is implied by the epistolary form helps Seneca to represent himself as removed from other social transactions, such as campaigning for office, litigating, attending dinner parties and recitations, and trading recommendations and other favors, all transactions that, if they are engaged in actually rather than figuratively, he represents as insidiously promoting the adoption of false values. As a correspondent, Seneca acts within society, and yet, by transforming the social practices of Roman aristocratic life into metaphors, he attempts to hold society at a safe distance.

In comparison with Cicero's correspondence, the compass of Seneca's epistolary corpus is narrow both in chronology and in number. We have 124 letters in twenty books, all written by Seneca and all addressed to Lucilius, an equestrian, the procurator of Sicily, and the dedicatee also of the *Natural Questions* and *De providentia*.¹⁸ The collection probably was published serially, in groups of books or singly, with the last books perhaps appearing immediately after his death, and it probably took shape as Seneca worked, rather than hewing to a preconceived, overarching scheme.¹⁹ Accordingly, though it is lamentable that the extant collection is incomplete (Aulus Gellius quotes from a twenty-second book), the absence of the collection's concluding part does not vitiate insights won by modern scholars through close attention to the arrangement of letters within and across books. As even this brief résumé has indicated, Seneca's letters to Lucilius are not a simple analogue to Cicero's epistolary corpus. Seneca's letters do not engage in the real, daily negotiation of friendship, prestige, and affection that was Cicero's major epistolary business. Nonetheless, Seneca's wealthy, Roman, senatorial audience entertained expectations for the style and social use of letters that were formed by Ciceronian precedent. In the second half of this study, I show how Seneca exploits, responds to, and attempts to reform those expectations.

Friendship and Gift Exchange

Remarks on epistolary privacy and its violation drawn from Cicero's letters may sketch for us some rules of Roman epistolary etiquette, but also, and more



importantly for the purposes of this study, they provide a vivid demonstration of how letters might be self-consciously wielded as both the medium for friendship and the means of its display. A letter from 46 BC is addressed to Gaius Trebonius, a lieutenant of Caesar who was setting out for Spain to assist in the defeat of the Republican forces there. Trebonius was involved at the time in an exchange of literary gifts with Cicero. In that letter Cicero meets Trebonius's objections to a letter Cicero had written to Gaius Licinius Calvus: "First of all, I sent that letter to Calvus no more expecting it to circulate beyond its addressee than the letter you are reading now. We write in one way letters intended solely for those to whom we send them, and another way when we think they will reach many readers." (*Primum enim ego illas Calvo litteras misi non plus quam has quas nunc legis existimans exituras; aliter enim scribimus quod eos solos quibus mittimus, aliter quod multos lecturos putamus*, *Fam.* 15.21.4 [207].) But this line of defense is probably somewhat disingenuous.²⁰ After all, Cicero and his friends routinely enclosed letters received in letters sent, so some letters were passed from their ostensible sole addressee to other readers as enclosures, and elsewhere Cicero comments on a leaked letter to Caesar with little surprise (*Att.* 8.2 [152], 8.9 [188]).²¹ Given the premium placed on public visibility in Rome, men in Cicero's milieu often would have welcomed the wider circulation of letters that formally claimed to be private. Even when wider circulation was not an aim, canny aristocrats probably wrote with that possibility well in mind.

An expectation of privacy for familiar letters did exist, but it ranged along a spectrum, based on circumstances and the kinds of letters concerned. Correspondence could include truly confidential letters that were meant for the eyes of a single addressee, as well as open letters that were explicitly addressed to the senate and Roman people. Cicero admits that he once opened and read a letter from Pilia to Quintus and then resealed the packet, an incident that reveals both the expectation of confidentiality and the ease of its violation (*Att.* 11.9 [220]).²² Various points on this spectrum are occupied by letters like *Fam.* 1.9 [20], addressed to a single person (Publius Cornelius Lentulus Spather) and undertaking a quasi-public self-justification of Cicero's pro-Caesar actions after the conference at Luca in 55, and the first letter to Quintus (*Q Fr.* 1.1 [1]), which reads more like an essay on "how to be a provincial governor" than a message intended for Cicero's brother alone.²³ Conversely, Cicero blasts Antony for violating epistolary etiquette (2 *Phil.* 7), because Antony had read aloud a letter from Cicero, addressed to him alone, before a meeting of the senate. The exposure of the letter's contents was meant to embarrass Cicero. We can verify for ourselves the insincerity of this letter and Cicero's acknowledgment of

it to Atticus, since the letter survives enclosed in a letter to Atticus, along with the letter from Antony to which it replies (*Att.* 14.13A and B [367A and B]). Cicero's riposte, which ends by implying that the letter to Antony may have been a forgery, would have at least confused the issue.²⁴ The episode confirms that conventions of epistolary privacy not only were not inviolable, but could be deliberately manipulated. In fact, both Trebonius's complaint about the letter to Calvus and the quarrel with Antony are anecdotes about the negotiation of intimacy, incidents that illustrate how the comparative degrees and nuances of friendship were worked out and communicated via epistolary practice.

Cicero's friendships, in all their variety, are amply attested by his correspondence. Indeed, the correspondence *Ad familiares* serves as a main source for Peter Brunt's seminal study of *amicitia* in the late Republic.²⁵ We have no comparable record of Seneca's *amicitiae*, epistolary or otherwise, though the vicissitudes of his career indicate both that he maintained friendships in high places and that he weathered the perils that accompanied them, including exile. Eventually, he was required to commit suicide at the emperor's command. Both Cicero and Seneca were not only practitioners of *amicitia*, however, but also its theoreticians. Cicero's work *Laelius de amicitia*, addressed and dedicated to his friend Atticus, was composed in 44 BC, in the wake of Caesar's assassination, and survives in full. Its explication of true friendship emphasizes the role of virtue, which Cicero's speaker Laelius concedes is found only among the wise. He rejects a prolonged discussion of purely ideal friendship, however, in favor of describing real friendship among pairs or small groups of men regarded as good by ordinary, rather than strict philosophical, standards. True friendships among these men, Laelius claims, will be everlasting and invulnerable to circumstance. And yet he also concedes that it requires luck (*felicitas*) as well as prudence (*sapientia*) to maintain friendship over a lifetime. The fragments of *Quomodo amicitia continenda sit*, Seneca's work on friendship, are not extensive enough to allow one to generalize at length about its contents or its relation to Cicero's *De amicitia*, but in the extant text Seneca too distinguishes the rarity of true friendship from the popular understanding of the term, whence men may easily fill their houses with ersatz "friends."²⁶ We can be virtually certain that Seneca's theoretical work agreed with Cicero's in asserting that true friendship is a good in itself and ought to be pursued for its own sake, rather than for any material advantage that might accrue from it. On the other hand, as a correspondent Cicero does not scruple to name as *amici* men whose warm feelings he solicited for largely circumstantial and utilitarian reasons, and we may reasonably suspect that Seneca's practice was similarly flexible.

As for gift exchange, it figures in both Seneca and Cicero's theoretical



works, though as Miriam Griffin points out, Cicero pays little attention to gifts in his *De amicitia*, and there is no indication that Seneca's work on friendship devoted more attention to the topic.²⁷ Instead, Cicero treats the granting of *beneficia* and the attendant qualities of *beneficentia*, *benignitas*, or *liberalitas* as part of the cardinal virtue of justice (*iustitia*) in Book 1 of the *De officiis* (*Off.* 1.42–50).²⁸ Griffin argues that for Cicero, the exchange of *beneficia* creates a distinct type of relationship, which we might identify with Aristotle's utilitarian friendship, though Cicero himself does not do so.²⁹ In contrast to Cicero, Seneca treats the topic at length in his *De beneficiis*. Griffin suggests that this work, occupying seven books, “reflects the need to adapt the traditional Roman social code to the existence of a new phenomenon, the Princeps.” As she writes, “The part of the social code it treats was of particular importance in maintaining the aristocratic social patterns of the Republic. The new factor had to be assimilated.”³⁰ I will argue in Part Two that Seneca's concern with gift and debt permeates his letter collection, although gift exchange *per se* is the overt subject of only one of the *Moral Epistles*, Letter 81. There, Seneca remarks briefly on the difference between friendship and a relationship based on trading favors: “[A non-Stoic listener] is amazed when we say, ‘Only the wise person knows how to love. Only the wise person is a friend.’ And yes, requiting gratitude is a part of love and friendship, but requital is common and making requital falls to many more than true friendship does.” (Deinde idem admiratur cum dicimus, “solus sapiens scit amare, solus sapiens amicus est.” Atqui et amoris et amicitiae pars est referre gratiam, immo hoc magis vulgare est et in plures cadit quam vera amicitia, *Ep.* 81.12.) The distinction Seneca draws here between true friendship (*vera amicitia*) and showing gratitude by making counter-gifts (*referre gratiam*) sketches an answer to an issue Cicero avoids in the *De officiis*: to wit, what the connection is between friendship and the exchange of benefits by members of the same class.³¹

Drawing on pioneering ethnographic and theoretical accounts of gift exchange such as those of Malinowski, Mauss, and Sahlins, Lewis Hyde in his own synthetic treatment of the gift enumerates three defining characteristics, each of which is also exhibited by Cicero's correspondence. First, the gift engages at minimum two participants, but circulation of the gift involves three or more participants, sometimes many more.³² Letters, of course, require at least two participants, and Cicero's frequently include three: the letter-writer, his addressee/recipient, who was sometimes but not always the letter's bearer, and a further audience of one or more readers beyond the named addressee.³³ Second, gifts (and letters) move, and movement is essential to the fulfillment of their purpose. Third, as they are exchanged, gifts increase. In the most obvious epistolary expression of this trait, familiar letters beget responses.³⁴ But in

the relationships that Cicero's correspondence documents, we can see that letters are a requisite part of the exchange but not its sole component. Rather, as *amicitia* continues to grow and becomes more enmeshed within an increasing and increasingly complex network of personal connections, a greater variety of items (both tangible, like books, and intangible, like financial advice) are included in the exchange, and the correspondence itself, or the relationship that it represents and that it carries on, grows in value. To these three cross-cultural characteristics of the gift, we may add two more, the first of which is identified most closely with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, the second of which is a central insight of Marcel Mauss.³⁵ Gifts, or the social value of gifts and gift exchange, including the promotion of both giver and receivers' social standing and the continuing obligations that giving and receiving gifts entail, are systematically denied or misrecognized, and become the object of concerted euphemistic activity and discourse, on both the giving and receiving ends. Even Cicero's theorizing account of generosity in the *De officiis* participates in self-deceiving misrecognition, when he writes that there are two sides to generosity, giving and requiting gifts. Giving, he says, is in our power ("in nostra potestate est")—that is, voluntary. Returning gifts, on the other hand, is required of the good man ("non reddere viro bono non licet," *Off.* 1.48). Cicero elides any mention of *receiving* gifts by moving directly from giving to giving back. By focusing on giving and making requital, and giving back more than one has received, if possible, Cicero avoids enunciating the awkward fact that he and his readers will sometimes, of necessity, be recipients rather than givers. Moreover, although an initial gift may indeed be voluntary, gifts place their recipients under an obligation to make a return.³⁶ Cicero's letters, too, partake in a polite social fiction of voluntarism. He and his correspondents generate and elaborate rhetorical euphemizing tactics that downplay or deny the self-interested dimensions of their correspondence (and of *amicitia* in general). Fifth and finally, gifts simultaneously promote competition and social cohesion.³⁷ So do Cicero's letters, which create and strengthen social bonds, knitting individuals more closely together, and at the same time exhibit strongly eristic tendencies, painting the participants in a correspondence not only as rivals in affection, but also at times as rivals in literary and other intellectual pursuits and attainments, in virtue, and in the affections of others. The eristic quality of Roman friendship may reach even areas where we are surprised and uncomfortable to find it, as is the case in Cicero's consolatory correspondence.³⁸

Cicero's letters move, multiply, motivate, and euphemize like gifts, but they are in fact only one of the "social games" that make up what Pierre Bourdieu has called "practice."³⁹ Nonetheless, analyzing Cicero's letter-writing practice as a species of gift exchange, and individual letters as gifts, or parts of a gift, will



enable us to acknowledge and account for their pervasively social and functional qualities. It gives us a framework for discerning and articulating the unspoken rules that govern Cicero's epistolary rhetoric and practice, and thus for surveying and analyzing the rhetorical tactics of the letters, and for appreciating their author's genius for deploying these tactics in skillful and innovative ways. With this framework in place, we may comment on significant parallels between Cicero's correspondence and works that were produced in the first instance as literature—for example, the poetry of Catullus—without losing sight of important differences between the instrumentality of correspondence fully embedded in ordinary social practice and the more attenuated (or at least differently misrecognized) social instrumentality of literary works produced *qua* literature. Additionally, approaching Ciceronian correspondence as gift exchange enables us to observe when an exchange breaks down, and to see how that failure is managed. Often Cicero attempts to mend breaches with even more, and more carefully composed, verbiage. Accordingly, the first chapter of this study considers an array of rhetorical forms of euphemism that Cicero employs for managing the maintenance of relationships and the exchange of favors that he and his peers accomplished in part through correspondence. Analyzed together, these tactics of familiar correspondence show the importance of denying self-interest outright, but also the power of its carefully controlled revelation as a means of demonstrating a community of interests and a resemblance to one's addressee that could verge on the familial or even approach co-identity.

Chapter 2 turns to a subtype of familiar correspondence, traditional letters of consolation for bereavement or political difficulties. The management of grief was not exempt from the constellation of practices that brought credit to a Roman when he was observed to perform it well. A bereaved man could make the best of his situation and even enhance his good reputation by bearing his misfortune bravely, so long as he was observed doing so.⁴⁰ Consolations partake of epistolary gift exchange not only by providing opportunities to offer someone a kindness in the form of acknowledging and sympathizing with his or her grief, but also by offering conventional therapeutic advice to the bereaved. But contrary to our own cultural practice, Roman consolatory correspondence is given to markedly eristic rhetoric. A consoler will remind his addressee of his duty and adduce relevant examples of self-control, not hesitating to include among them himself.

Chapter 3 treats a different kind of epistolary consolation—namely, consolation for the absence of a friend, rather than for a substantial misfortune such as exile or death. These letters act less sufficiently as gifts in and of themselves. Instead, they tend accompany other gifts, often books or their carriers. Both kinds of consolatory letters participate in the Roman gift economy, but

each highlights a different aspect of this participation. Consolatory letters for misfortunes such as bereavement stimulate competition in virtue, while, at the same time, their circulation encourages social cohesion. Letters that console for absence but are not formal consolations, on the other hand, emphasize the libidinal nature of the gift. They offer to both partners comfort derived from writing, from reading, even from caressing the physical text. But these letters provoke desire even as they satisfy it, and so the writers of these letters produce additional texts, which may renew satisfaction but also, in turn, desire.⁴¹

The outlines of two alternative although not mutually exclusive kinds of friendship emerge from an examination of Ciceronian consolatory letters. The first mode of consolation subscribes to and reinforces a traditional, idealized notion of friendship based on shared values, in which friends act as candid mirrors for one another and also spur each other on to greater virtue. The second mode does not exhort the reader to control his emotions, but instead encourages and amplifies desire and endorses its continuance and its continued satisfaction through correspondence. Implicitly, this mode subscribes to an aesthetic and eroticized version of friendship between men that is a hallmark of Catullus and Augustan elegy, but that we may be surprised to encounter in Cicero's prose.⁴²

Chapter 4 turns to letters that manage the exchange of books and people, focusing on letters of recommendation. These types of letters provide particularly interesting and clear examples of the combination of rhetorical talent and expertise, together with the social virtues (tact, poise, sensitivity: *humanitas*), required to produce elegant letters that were effective instruments of social negotiation. Interestingly, while both consolatory letters and letters of recommendation participate in gift exchange, they perform their gift function in different ways: the consolatory letter can be construed as a precious object, whereas the recommendation letter often accompanies other objects or persons that displace the letter itself from its central role as the exchanged object—that is, the gift. The two types of letter are also distinguished by how they relate to the persons implicated in their exchange. When the gift exchange involves a letter recommending a human protégé, that person takes on some of the object status that the letter would otherwise possess. Conversely, letters that are accompanied by texts sometimes personify them.

Part Two of this study, in chapters 5 through 8, turns to the *Moral Epistles* of Seneca the Younger. Chapter 5 demonstrates how, in the first three books of the collection, Seneca deliberately removes correspondence from the realm of gift exchange by exposing Ciceronian euphemizing and then by ostentatiously belaboring both the literal and the figurative dimensions of the vocabulary of gift and debt. Seneca repeatedly figures himself as indebted to Lucilius, a claim



that is hard to take seriously, since no replies from Lucilius are represented. The aggravated absence of Lucilius may motivate Seneca's readers to step into his place, taking on the role of Seneca's partner so as to restore equilibrium to their exchange. Or, Seneca's claim to indebtedness may inspire his readers to question whether a letter is ever a free gift from its sender, or whether in fact it always imposes an obligation on its recipient, who is bound by unspoken social rules to reply. This critique of epistolary exchange turns conventional understanding upside down. Writing and sending a letter becomes a coercive act or imposition, more properly requiring an apology from the sender than gratitude from the recipient, and a letter sent in return might be characterized as retaliation. Imagined as a commercial relationship, the positions of debtor and creditor would be reversed: a letter's sender becomes the debtor, having borrowed, appropriated, or stolen his correspondent's time. If the recipient replies, his letter balances the account, paying the debt of the original sender by incurring a debt of his own.

Chapter 6 argues that in tandem with his reformation of epistolary rhetoric and practice, Seneca undertakes a rehabilitation of *amicitia*. The new kind of friendship that he proposes rejects absolutely the social and political negotiation that permeates Cicero's correspondence with friends. Instead, Senecan friendship is dedicated to the perfection of the individual self by living philosophically and by reporting on one's philosophical progress to fellow aspirants to wisdom (*proficientes*), replacing the corrupting and trivializing practices in which traditional Roman friendship was entangled with a program of epistolary self-examination, exhortation, and mutual encouragement. The role that letters play in philosophical friendship continues as a topic in the middle books of the collection, and so in chapter 7 I consider a series of letters in the first half of Book 4 (Letters 30–36), in which Seneca alternately promotes, exploits, and critiques a celebrated component of epistolarity, the letter's creation of illusory togetherness at the same time that it acts as a reminder of separation. The same series of letters shows a growing preoccupation with questions of identity: the personal identities of Seneca and Lucilius, the roles that they play vis-à-vis one another, the epistolary identity of the texts they exchange, and the importance, or nonimportance, of identity among friends. None of the issues raised in these letters are resolved. Indeed, the difficulty of deciding whether imperfect persons like Seneca and Lucilius can do more good than harm by acting as friends to one another drives Seneca to euphemize their relationship with the very metaphor he has spent the first books of the collection debunking: "Offer yourself to me, therefore, as a huge gift." (Adfer itaque te mihi, ingens munus, *Ep.* 35.3.)

Chapter 8 considers Letter 63, a consolatory epistle that acts as the culmination of a series of letters foregrounding Seneca's meditations on his own approaching death, illuminates the interconnection between friendship and

dying well, and also, as the inaugural letter of Book 7, marks a new beginning. The epistolary consolation is familiar from Ciceronian correspondence as a means of mediating relations between the writer and the addressee. It provided an occasion for demonstrating esteem for an *amicus*, and for performing virtue for one another and for other friends who might form a further audience concerned with the proper conduct of grief. Seneca, instead, uses the letter of consolation to critique conventional rhetoric and the practices of mourning, and to show how the replacement of orthodox concerns with true Stoic values removes the causes of grief and supplies a community of friends who achieve collective, if not individual, immortality. Moreover, not only does this consolatory letter give itself to its addressee; it is a gift whose reach extends past Lucilius to the anonymous reader and friend, and also inward, toward its author. Although Seneca's rejection of public *existimatio*, evaluation by the public eye, is at odds with the traditional aristocratic way of being in the world, his emphasis on the social character of a good death is very Roman. Likewise, for all the transformations Seneca works in the *Moral Epistles*, a resemblance to the function of Ciceronian correspondence remains: Seneca's letters also create, maintain, and extend community.

In a book that concerns itself with Roman *amicitia* and letters, a reader may well feel entitled to some explanation for why Cicero's famous friendship and correspondence with Titus Pomponius Atticus does not occupy the center of attention. As noted above, sixteen books of Cicero's letters *Ad Atticum* are extant. The earliest letters were written in 68 BC, and the latest in 44. They provide an unparalleled, albeit one-sided, record of an ancient friendship that endured for the entirety of Cicero's adult life. In its duration and its candor, the friendship of Cicero and Atticus seems close to the ideal that Cicero elaborates in his essay *Laelius de amicitia*. But Eleanor Leach has argued persuasively that Atticus's abstention from politics, which enabled him to become Cicero's closest and most enduring friend, simultaneously disqualified him from being Cicero's ideal friend, because the ideal friendship to which Cicero subscribed necessarily encompassed joint participation in politics and public life.⁴³ The *De amicitia* states repeatedly that ideal friends will be full partners in public affairs as well as domestic (e.g., *Amic.* 103). For Cicero, this ideal was most closely realized in the friendship of Laelius and Scipio. Laelius counts himself to have lived happily because of his friendship with Scipio ("beate vixisse videar, quia cum Scipione vixerim"), and he rests his expectation of immortal fame on their friendship as well: "I hope that the memory of our friendship may be preserved forever; and this gives me all the more pleasure, inasmuch as in the whole course of history hardly three or four friends are remembered by name; and I believe there is hope that the friendship of Scipio and Laelius will



be known to posterity among these.” (*amicitiae nostrae memoriam spero semipiternam fore; idque eo mihi magis est cordi, quod ex omnibus saeculis vix tria aut quattuor nominantur paria amicorum; quo in genere sperare videor Scipionis et Laeli amicitiam notam posteritati fore, Amic. 15.*)⁴⁴ In Cicero’s own life, as Leach points out, he seems to have briefly entertained the notion that he could play Laelius to Pompey’s Scipio, but realizing the ideal of a friend with whom he could be equally connected over time in caring for the state and in private matters proved impossible.⁴⁵

Certainly Seneca knew of the exemplary friendship of Laelius and Scipio, and it is very likely that he knew this passage of Cicero’s *De amicitia* as well.⁴⁶ But when, in Letter 21.3–5, Seneca assures his friend that their correspondence will immortalize Lucilius’s name, he avoids invoking the friendship of Laelius and Scipio in favor of two friendships that are guaranteed defective in terms of the ideal espoused in Cicero’s treatise. The first pair, Epicurus and Idomeneus, falls short because Epicurus explicitly discouraged participation in politics, both by Idomeneus and as a general tenet of his instructions for living well. The second pair fails because one partner renounced a public career out of personal inclination and philosophical principle, and the other was forced into early retirement from statesmanship by civil war. The latter pair, of course, is Cicero and Atticus. These two pairs of correspondents are appropriately exemplary for Seneca precisely because an epistolary record attests to their friendships, and it is through their correspondence that their names remain linked, and famous. But Seneca goes on to quote Vergil’s guarantee of fame to the non-epistolary friendship of Nisus and Euryalus. It is too much to claim that the omission of Laelius and Scipio from Letter 21 was deliberate on Seneca’s part, but nonetheless it surely would have been counterproductive for him to mention that immortal pair by name, thereby reminding his reader of Cicero’s *De amicitia* and its ideal of virtuous friendship based on joint action and real togetherness in both public and private life. Not only does Seneca—as I argue in Part Two—not endorse this traditional ideal; he seeks to supplant it with his own vision of true friendship as a wholly epistolary connection disengaged from the sphere of social action.

At the outset of Letter 118, Lucilius’s supposed request for more letters from Seneca puts Lucilius in Cicero’s place and Seneca in that of Atticus.⁴⁷ According to the *mise en scène* established and maintained in the collection, this parallel fits. Seneca has withdrawn into philosophical retirement, whereas Lucilius is still engaged in public life. Moreover, the parallel is significant. Taken together with the passage from Letter 21, it suggests that Seneca construed the friendship of Cicero and Atticus as a positive analogue for his relationship with Lucilius, to the degree that both friendships, and correspondences, were

spurred by mutual affection inspired by a shared pursuit of virtue. Of course, because Atticus was an Epicurean rather than a Stoic, and because Cicero never seriously renounced political life, the analogy was limited. But Seneca did not aim in the *Moral Epistles* to mount an attack on Cicero *per se* (Ciceronian values are another story) or on his friendship with Atticus.⁴⁸ Rather, he takes broader aim at the euphemistic rhetoric and practices of correspondence and *amicitia* that Cicero's total epistolary corpus embodied, more or less fortuitously, but certainly excellently.

After Cicero: The *Cursus Publicus*, Poetic Letters, and Seneca

The political revolution accomplished by Augustus was accompanied by and interwoven with a cultural revolution whose effects can be traced in all kinds of public and private endeavors.⁴⁹ This study does not propose to show the progress of this cultural revolution in the realm of epistolography, whether step by step or by leaps and bounds, but it is critical to our understanding of Cicero's successor Seneca to acknowledge that these revolutions—political and cultural—had profound effects on the rhetoric and practices through which Roman aristocrats represented themselves, advanced their careers, and carried on friendships. More than a century elapsed between Cicero's last letters, sent in 43 BC, and Seneca's publication of the *Moral Epistles* around AD 64/65. No collection of prose correspondence from the intervening period is extant, although Suetonius's quotations from the letters of Augustus are a tantalizing reminder of what once was available in the imperial archives.

We can mark but not bridge the gap between Ciceronian letter writing and Seneca's *Moral Epistles* by mentioning briefly two watersheds of Roman epistolary practice that occurred during the Augustan era. The first is Augustus's establishment of the *cursus publicus*, a postal service maintained and administered by the government to provide safe passage throughout the empire for military messengers bringing news to Rome. The second is the composition and circulation of whole books of verse letters. These works, Horace's *Epistulae* and Ovid's *Heroides*, *Tristia*, and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, show that the Roman poets had perceived and begun to exploit the dramatic, narrative, and figurative potential of the epistolary form, not merely in single instances such as Catullus's poem 50 (which I discuss in chapter 3), but as collections. Both developments, the establishment of the *cursus publicus* and the emergence of poetic letter collections, are products of the cultural revolution that accompanied the establishment of the principate.

Mentions of the *cursus publicus* in literature are infrequent. Archaeological



evidence for it is widely dispersed over space and time, and the interpretation of its place in the minds of Romans is correspondingly challenging. Although the *cursus publicus* may have had some bearing on epistolary practices, its influence on the epistolary practice of the majority of letter-writers was probably minimal and indirect, since the service was limited to official government messages. Suetonius gives the fullest description (*Aug.* 49.3):

And to make it possible to have news brought more quickly and promptly and to know what was happening in each province, [Augustus] arranged first for able-bodied men and eventually for carriages to be stationed at frequent intervals along military roads. The latter arrangement has been found the more convenient as it enables the men who carry the letters from the scene of action to answer questions as well if that is what the situation demands.⁵⁰

The purpose of the *cursus publicus* was to convey messages of military and administrative importance to the center of power at Rome. Private correspondence likely remained largely in the hands of private messengers (*tabellarii*), the slaves, freedmen, and clients who had always carried and passed along correspondence, in addition to the professional messengers employed by tax-collecting corporations. Note that even this first official postal service did not remove the element that made all ancient correspondence personally mediated, when compared with the impersonality of the modern post office: one “post boy” traveled the whole route along with each written message. He delivered the written message, and could orally supplement it.

Individuals undoubtedly observed formal or tacit restrictions on the use of the *cursus publicus* for personal business with greater or lesser scruple. Nonetheless, Horace’s playful letter to an officer serving with Tiberius may invite us to wonder whether an Augustan reader would envision its reply arriving by private messenger or through the official military post.

Iuli Flore, quibus terrarum militet oris
 Claudius Augusti privignus, scire laboro.
 Thracane vos Hebrusque nivali compede vinctus
 an freta vicinas inter currentia turris
 an pingues Asiae campi collesque morantur? (*Ep.* 1.3.1–5)⁵¹

Iulus Florus, in what lands does Tiberius,
 stepson of Augustus, campaign? I’m anxious to know.
 Do Thrace and the Hebrus, bound with snowy fetters,
 or the straits flowing between neighboring towers,
 or the fat fields and hills of Asia detain you?

Horace advertises his addressee's proximity to the imperial household by stressing his membership in the entourage of Tiberius. He also associates the literary projects of the various men on campaign with their military maneuvers, and so suggests that he attaches equal importance to news of their literary and their military progress. Through Florus Horace hopes to learn about the activities of Tiberius, Titius, Celsus, and Munatius. Tiberius's business is a diplomatic and potentially military mission to Parthia, aiming to recover the legionary standards lost to Parthia in 53 BC by Crassus, but Horace asks whether Titius is still writing epinician poetry (9–11), advises Celsus again to resist borrowing too freely from works already published (14–20), and wonders whether Munatius may be indulging his talents for verse, forensic oratory, or jurisprudence (20–25). In a movement reminiscent of several Ciceronian letters (e.g., *Fam.* 1.9, discussed below in chapter 3), the final portion of *Epistle* 3 turns from literary connections to personal links: "You ought to write back with this news—whether you care for Munatius as much as you ought, or whether your favor comes together in vain, badly mended, and tears apart again." (Debes hoc etiam rescribere, sit tibi curae / quanta conveniat Munatius. an male sarta / gratia nequiquam coit et rescinditur, *Ep.* 1.3.30–32.) Horace also closes the letter in a manner that recalls Ciceronian correspondence, although his diction is poetic. He uses gentle flattery to reaffirm the virtually fraternal bond of friendship that joins him to Florus ("indigni fratrum rumpere foedus," 35), and he expresses hope for his return. The opening of *Epistle* 3 emphasizes the vastness of Roman *imperium*. Its geographic catalogue calls attention to how far letters must and do travel to permit the communication of friends. But it also stresses Florus's proximity to Tiberius and thus to the center of power, which was now mobile and, at the time of the poem's composition, temporarily located on the geographic periphery of the empire.

The distribution of wealth and power in ancient Rome can be envisioned as a pyramid, both before and after the establishment of the principate.⁵² Even during the republican period, power to govern was restricted to a narrow top slice of this pyramid. Members of certain noble clans reliably could be found there, but the annual redistribution of magistracies and military commands assured some circulation of power within that elite stratum, and it was possible for "new men" (*novi homines*, from families that had not previously produced a consul) to enter it.⁵³ Other forms of power and influence also existed, enabling men to compete for *auctoritas*, *dignitas*, and *gratia*. As authority was increasingly arrogated by and attributed to the family and circle of Augustus, however, the means of acquiring and wielding *auctoritas* by individuals outside the imperial household grew fewer and less significant. As the imperial household assumed a fixed monopoly on the regulation of *mores*, the authority of the



senatorial class withered. Concomitantly, demonstrating and capitalizing on proximity to the emperor gained importance. These developments must have been reflected in epistolary rhetoric and practice, just as they were in other venues for the exercise and display of influence. The relative visibility and prestige of declamation versus political oratory provides an analogy.⁵⁴ In the same period in which rhetorical declamation supplants real public legislative debate, poetic letter collections like Horace's *Epistulae* become prominent.⁵⁵ If letters like Cicero's, aiming to influence the course of public events directly, were even attempted in this period, they are invisible to us now.

The emperor's patronage of literature and his institution of a military postal service are disparate but parallel examples of the realignment of authority at Rome. I will not attempt here to chart a relationship between Catullus's epistolary address of individuals in single poems, contemporary with Cicero's letters, and the real—albeit increasingly unruly and dysfunctional—circulation of power in the republic, and the appearance of Horace's and Ovid's whole poetry books styled as correspondence under the more orderly and less free regime of Augustus. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this literary phenomenon seems to have occurred in tandem with the establishment of the *cursus publicus*. The roughly simultaneous establishment of a state-run postal system with the composition and circulation of deliberately literary correspondences is suggestive. In early modern France, these two developments went hand in hand; the parallel development in Augustan Rome may not be a coincidence.⁵⁶ Strictures on the real circulation of power that the principate imposed may have redirected the creative talents and ambitions of Roman aristocrats toward less formal, less overtly ambitious, and less oral forms of expression at the same time that the development of organized government services and bureaucracy, such as the public post, encouraged wider dissemination of texts, which could be read or recited anywhere in the empire, in solitude or in small gatherings.

In important ways, then, the letter-writer Seneca is an heir of the Augustan poets as well as of Cicero. Seneca may well have absorbed from Horace and Ovid lessons in the stylish and subtle manipulation of the notion of the text as a gift and as a person.⁵⁷ Moreover, these poets used poetic letter collections to simultaneously emphasize and deny the insuperability both of the literal, geographic distances encompassed by empire and of the differences in perspective that are caused by structural differentiation of social status. The *Moral Epistles* turn these issues inside out: Seneca never mentions the current *princeps*, nor does he give any indication of his own proximity to the center of power. The distance that separates Lucilius, who is understood to be in Sicily, from Seneca, who writes from a variety of more or (usually) less well-described locations, may be best surmounted not, as for Cicero and the poets, by frequent and

intimate letters, but by the power of thought.⁵⁸ Actual distance presents far less difficulty for Seneca than do our own internal inconsistencies. Likewise, the euphemistic navigation of status differences by means of the generous application of the words *amicus* and *amicitia* to describe a relationship in which two partners hold different degrees of power, such as that of Horace and Maecenas, does not apply to the relationship between Lucilius and Seneca, since Seneca tacitly refuses to define their relationship by the proximity of either party to the *princeps*. In fact, Seneca seizes opportunities to repudiate the idea that differences in social status are meaningful at all when a proper internal standard of evaluation—namely, progress toward virtue—is applied.⁵⁹

The only proper business of friends, Seneca suggests, is their joint aspiration and progress toward virtue, a project in which their relative social standing is of no relevance. Not surprisingly, then, several internal literary features of the letters to Lucilius liken them to therapeutic philosophical conversation. For instance, topical discontinuity characterizes the *Moral Epistles* as letters, as Marcus Wilson rightly observes, and yet, as Wilson has also pointed out, each of Seneca's letters is complete in itself.⁶⁰ Each letter stands at once alone and in significant relationship to other letters and to the collection as a whole, and every letter in the collection could be viewed as its last without leaving the opus incomplete. The continuously resolved form that results is in keeping with Seneca's views about death: one should think about death frequently, expect it calmly, and understand that it may come unexpectedly. In order not to be caught off guard, one must be always ready to relinquish life (*Ep.* 24 *passim*, 26.8–10). For Seneca, this readiness may require that he not leave an unfinished heap of manuscript on his desk. But each letter to Lucilius that Seneca lived to add to the collection also forms part of a continuous opus, a continuing record of Seneca's progress toward freedom, and each letter records the necessary daily practice of meditating on how to live.⁶¹ Moreover, the brisk, discontinuous style of the letters makes each appear to be the work of mere hours rather than a text polished over days or months.⁶² Writing or reading these letters easily could be undertaken, and represented, as a daily exercise or rite. The letter thus enables Seneca to exemplify his admonition to Lucilius to "embrace every hour" (*omnes horas complectere*, *Ep.* 1.2). The *Moral Epistles* simultaneously produce a record and example of friendship and offer instruction in friendship as Seneca sees it: a process of mutual moral bootstrapping in which each partner is concerned with the progress of both, but also a process in which the absent partner acts as a mirror for the writer's own self-scrutiny and a stand-in for his self-address.

Seneca's letter collection embodies a paradoxical harmonization of the project of Stoic philosophy, to live life continuously as though life were already complete ("[vivere] vita peracta," *Ep.* 32.5), with the Roman aristocratic project,



to achieve immortal glory. As such, it perfectly fulfills a trait of the gift that is at once paradoxical and central to its definition: The *Moral Epistles* benefit at one and the same time their author, who remains in a sense alive through the continued action of his words in the world—that is, being read—and their reader, who both receives Seneca's gift and reciprocates it by reading. And they do so with an ironic twist: while undertaking a critique of the role and action of gifts in conventional Roman friendship.

A similar combination of familiarity with a confident assurance that his letters will outlive his voice is also evident in one of Seneca's admirers. Petrarch's adoption of Cicero as a model and a foil may be better known than his appreciation for Seneca, but his debt to both ancients may have inspired this remark on the advantages of writing letters:

I began this book as a young man; I finish it when already old. Or rather I pause in mid-course, for this is one of those books to which death alone gives the final touch. How can I expect my conversations with friends to be ended by anything but the ending of life? What can silence me while I breathe, when I plan to speak to them still with my chill lips from the grave?⁶³

PART ONE



CICERO

The Social Life of Letters

1



EUPHEMISM AND ITS LIMITS

Cicero was a master of epistolary euphemism, adept and inventive at flattering his addressees, and shrewd in gauging, on the one hand, how much to suggest or reveal and, on the other, how much to conceal or disguise his own interest in the outcome or continuation of various exchanges. He delicately manages and discreetly veils the self-interest that permeated late republican letter exchanges, and, overall, he was very successful in using correspondence to make the most of his social and political resources. Pierre Bourdieu, in his analysis of the phenomena of collective self-deception, misrecognition, and euphemism, on which the “social game” of successful gift exchange depends, remarks that “only a virtuoso with a perfect mastery of his ‘art of living’ can play on all the resources inherent in the ambiguities and indeterminacies of behaviours and situations so as to produce the actions appropriate in each case, to do at the right moment that of which people will say ‘There was nothing else to be done’, and to do it the right way.”¹ Cicero, if anyone, was the epistolary virtuoso of his time. Yet even in his letters, there are occasional slips or moments of clumsiness.

This chapter concerns both masterstrokes and fumbles. Specifically, we will consider several rhetorical tactics that drew attention away from the self-interested dimensions of correspondence between Cicero and his associates. First among these are declarations of friendship closely linked to denials of benefit from the aforesaid friendship. These declarations and denials tend to be accompanied by flowery comments on what friendship means. Another means of euphemizing the exchange of favors that required still more rhetorical audacity and finesse was the indication and elaboration of overlapping interests.



Cicero often makes cleverly casual references to shared pursuits and affiliations that imply an identity of interest between writer and addressee. A third tactic was to represent mediated exchanges as though they were direct, by applying kinship terms to correspondents who were not kin to the letter-writer, or who were only distantly related. Finally, we will see how Cicero used personification to euphemize an exchange, and compare this stratagem to a correspondent's attempt at taking the opposite tack—using objectification rather than personification for a similar purpose. All these tactics are both socially determined coping mechanisms and, at the same time, instances of an individual writer's rhetorical dexterity and invention. Taken together, they enable us to view more clearly operations of obligation among the Roman elite. The euphemizing rhetoric of Cicero's correspondence demonstrates how subtle, flexible, and dynamic the negotiation of power and identity was in the senatorial class, and with what great care it might be cultivated. The correspondence also shows the limits of what words might achieve.

The Wages of Friendship (*Fam.* 3.13 [76]) and 15.9 [101])

We begin with a letter to Appius Claudius Pulcher, the addressee of all thirteen letters in Book 3 of *Epistulae ad familiares*. Of Cicero's friendship with Appius, Peter Brunt has written that "the *amicitia* was purely political, a matter of expediency. It is therefore the more striking that Cicero chooses to represent it as something more."² In fact, Cicero's letters to Appius exhibit euphemistic rhetorical tactics that recur throughout his epistolary corpus, though deployed with the particular deftness that this prickly addressee warranted. This letter features two of the tactics mentioned above—namely, the denial of tangible benefits in *amicitia* (which we might call the "friendship is its own reward" trope), plus the articulation of an identity of interest between writer and addressee. In this letter, Cicero thanks Appius for voting to award him a *supplicatio* for his military accomplishments in Cilicia. In the first half he enumerates and celebrates Appius's labors on his behalf. He makes visible the work that Appius has done for him and creates a written record of these favors. But in the second half of the letter, Cicero denies that his relationship with Appius is, or should be, a source of gain. Rather, he writes, "I propose to myself that friendship itself is the profit (*fructum*) of our friendship" (*mihi propono fructum amicitiae nostrae ipsam amicitiam*, *Fam.* 3.13.2 [76]).

This declaration seems breathtakingly disingenuous, coming immediately after an opening paragraph in which Cicero has at length and in detail exhibited the work Appius has done for him. Here is the opening of the letter:

Quasi divinarem tali in officio fore mihi aliquando expetendum studium tuum, sic, cum de tuis rebus gestis agebatur, inserviebam honori tuo. Dicam tamen vere: plus quam acceperas reddidisti. (*Fam.* 3.13.1)

As though I foresaw that your efforts for me in a similar situation would be much desired, at that time when your achievements were being deliberated, I was dedicated to your honor. Yet truly I may say that you have returned more than you received.

The past assistance that Cicero alludes to here seems to be his support for Appius's bid in 53 BC for a *supplicatio* in recognition of a successful term as pro-consular governor of Cilicia, immediately following his consulship in 54. Appius's support for Cicero's bid for a *supplicatio* in recognition of his own achievements as pro-consular governor of Cilicia is then as exactly reciprocal a favor as it could be. However, Cicero represents Appius's gift as the greater one:

Quis enim ad me non perscripsit te non solum auctoritate oratione sententia tua, quibus ego a tali viro contentus eram, sed etiam opera, consilio, domum veniendo, conveniendis meis nullum munus officii cuiquam reliquum fecisse? (*Fam.* 3.13.1)³

For who has not written to tell me that not only by your influence, your speeches, and your vote (from which benefits I would rest content with a man such as yourself), but also by your resources, your advice, your visiting my house, no gift of service for supporting me has been left to anyone else?

Cicero protests that he would have been satisfied with the services that Appius would have performed in his role as senator. His additional labors on Cicero's behalf have been more personal, and less self-evidently visible to the public, although Cicero says that they are already widely known, since he has learned of them through messages from multiple sources.

Why does Cicero inventory Appius's favors to him at such length, and in such detail? First, as a matter of etiquette. This is what a thank-you note does—it expresses pleasure in the gift and the thoughtfulness of the giver, and shows the recipient's grateful awareness of the giver's effort. We may note, too, that the expression of gratitude is a kind of preliminary counter-gift, or gift in return. It is also true that putting Appius's favors in writing benefits Cicero. We can easily imagine a scenario in which others would read this letter. Even if Appius did not care to circulate it, Cicero might. In so doing, he would activate a subtext of the letter that advertises his own worthiness as a friend. See what Appius has done for me? I must be worth working for.



Another reason for making a fuss over Appius's assistance may be anxiety that the perfect reciprocity of their support for one another may look suspiciously like a *quid pro quo* arrangement rather than the sincere, disinterested support of one friend for another. Cicero himself points out the apparent similarity of his earlier gift to Appius and Appius's recent assistance to him to forestall some other invidious person from doing so. But Cicero then takes pains to differentiate the two gifts, complimenting Appius's generosity and demonstrating his own gift-worthiness in the bargain.

The verb tenses in the first two sentences and the word *aliquando* also point up the fact that Cicero's service to Appius took place before Cicero could have known that he would be in a position to receive a similar gift from Appius. These sentences call attention to the lapse in time between the two incidents; Cicero and Appius did not simply swap favors.⁴ Rather, Appius has used a fortuitous opportunity to make good his debt of gratitude to Cicero. In case the allusion to the delay between one favor and the other and the inventory of Appius's extraordinarily generous services on Cicero's behalf are insufficient to persuade a skeptical or grudging reader of the disinterested, altruistic impulse for either man's behavior, Cicero begins the second half of the letter by proclaiming that the "profit" (*fructum*) of friendship is friendship itself, and thus denying, implicitly, that he or Appius has had any other gain in view.

Moreover, Cicero introduces a further means of euphemizing. He suggests that his own ideas and preferences are so closely aligned with those of Appius that there is no differentiating between them; what pleases one will please the other, in and out of the public eye.⁵ "For to you, I declare that I am your ally in public affairs, concerning which we hold the same views, and I am a close associate in daily life, which we cultivate in these accomplishments and pursuits." (Nam tibi me profiteor et in re publica socium, de qua idem sentimus, et in cotidiana vita coniunctum, quam his artibus studiisque colimus, *Fam.* 3.13.2.) When two friends are working with a shared purpose for common goals, it is easy to present their self-interest as naturally coinciding. However, the appearance of "natural" coincidence or identity of interest is an effect that the letter-writer strives for, which may or may not reflect the true state of affairs. In the case of Appius and Cicero's friendship, the thirteen letters of *Ad familiares* 3, all from Cicero to Appius, testify to the hard work Cicero invested in maintaining cordial relations with Appius, and to his persistence in doing so.⁶

It is worthy of note that Cicero opens this letter with a reminder of his service to Appius in the past, and that in section two he suggests that his connections may be of service to Appius in the future. By our standards, these reminders may seem ungracious. But similar statements or suggestions are not unusual in Cicero's letters, and they have an important function. They knit the present

occasion into an ongoing series of exchanges, both documenting and enacting the correspondents' relationship with one another. Even the deft mention of Cicero's past service to Appius with which the letter begins contains a punning reminder of their shared accomplishments and interests. "Quasi divinarem," Cicero begins. In a word, he alludes to his connection with Appius as a fellow member of the college of augurs, and Appius's dedication to him of a work on augury.⁷

The letter to Appius acknowledges a gift given and lays the ground for the continued exchange of favors. The letters we will look at next occupy a different position in the exchange of gifts. In both cases Cicero petitions the recipient for a favor—the letters are crafted to minimize the magnitude of his request, to present the addressee's cooperation as a foregone conclusion, and even to suggest that the requested gift will be as beneficial for the giver as it is for Cicero. The pose of disinterestedness that characterizes gift exchange is maintained in these letters by Cicero's positing that the interests of the addressee are identical to his own—so, he implies, he is asking his addressees to take actions that are not really favors at all, since they are, or are extremely similar to, the actions these addressees would take in any case, of their own volition.

A letter addressed to M. Claudius Marcellus, the consul in 51, upon the election of his cousin, Gaius Claudius Marcellus, to the consulship for 50 is ostensibly a note of congratulations. But in it Cicero lobbies for a wish of his own—namely, that his term in Cilicia not be extended. The request is brief and flattering:

Unum vero si addis ad praeclarissimas res consulatus tui, ut aut mihi succedat quam primum aliquis aut ne quid accedat temporis ad id quod tu mihi et senatus consulto et lege finisti, omnia me per te consecutum putabo. (*Fam.* 15.9.2 [101])

But if you add only one more thing to the outstanding accomplishments of your consulship, either that someone may succeed me as soon as possible, or that no time may be added to the term you set for me by law and decree of the senate, I will think I have obtained everything [I wanted] through you.

This sentence gracefully combines Cicero's request with an indirect promise of gratitude, should the service he requests be performed. However, by far the greater part of the letter is devoted to exclaiming over what a marvelous achievement for Marcus Marcellus is the election of Gaius. Moreover, Cicero leads with his congratulations, not his request. The letter opens with its addressee front and center: "I wholeheartedly rejoice that by the election of



Gaius Marcellus to the consulship you have reaped the reward of right family feeling, public spiritedness, and your own most distinguished and excellent term as consul.” (Te et pietatis in tuos et animi in rem publicam et clarissimi atque optimi consulatus C. Marcello consule facto fructum cepisse vehementer gaudeo, *Fam.* 15.9.1 [101].) Shackleton Bailey comments, “It seems a little strange that Cicero should make nothing of the candidate himself, attributing the success entirely to his cousin the Consul.”⁸ But if we take as Cicero’s primary aim in this letter the maintenance of his relationship with his addressee, then the occasion of Gaius’s election should be understood as providing Cicero with a pretext. The congratulations are requisite for advancing his real agenda: that is, reaffirming the bond between the letter’s writer and its reader, with an eye toward the granting of a specific favor. Cicero’s apparently odd distribution of credit—making the election of Gaius proof of cousin Marcus’s merits—becomes intelligible when we consider that Marcus Marcellus, after all, is the man of whom Cicero is asking a favor.

In his request, as we have seen, Cicero promises to consider his own accomplishments the result of Marcellus’s efforts (“omnia me per te consecutum putabo”). In his congratulations, he goes further, suggesting (although he attributes the suggestion to unnamed others) that he and Marcellus even resemble one another: “It gives very great pleasure when I hear from excellent and extremely discerning men that in all our words, deeds, pursuits, and habits I am like you—or you are like me” (maximaque laetitia adficio cum ab hominibus prudentissimis virisque optimis omnibus dictis factis, studiis institutis vel me tui similem esse audio vel te mei, *Fam.* 15.9.1). Cicero goes a step further here than he had in the letter to Appius. There, he stressed a common agenda and shared interests; here he emphasizes resemblance. However, he stops short of representing likeness as shared identity. He is less restrained in a letter addressed to Caesar.

You Are Another Me (*Fam.* 7.5 [26])

In the very first sentence of this letter, written in April 54, which recommends its bearer, Gaius Trebatius Testa, to its recipient, Caesar, Cicero enthusiastically proclaims Caesar his *alter ego*:⁹ “See how fully I am persuaded that you are another me, not only in those matters that pertain to myself, but also in those that affect my family and friends!” (Vide quam mihi persuaserim te me esse alterum, non modo in iis rebus quae ad me ipsum sed etiam in iis quae ad meos pertinent, *Fam.* 7.5.1.) Cicero goes on to explain that he had intended to promote Trebatius’s interests directly, by putting him on his own staff when he accompanied Pompey to Spain. Since Pompey has indefinitely delayed his

departure from Rome, Cicero has sent Trebatius to Caesar. The conclusion of the letter's first paragraph reiterates its opening sentiment, spelling out the ramifications, as Cicero sees them, of his and Caesar's like-mindedness: "I now want Trebatius to look to you for those things he had hoped for from me, and I have promised him your good will, really no less liberally than I was accustomed previously to promise my own" (*coepi velle ea Trebatium expectare a te quae sperasset a me, neque mehercule minus ei prolixè de tua voluntate promisi quam eram solitus de mea polliceri*, 7.5.1).

To judge from the quotation Cicero includes from an earlier letter in which Caesar acknowledges receipt of another protégé, the affectionate, effusive tone established by this letter's first sentence, and continued throughout, carefully aims to match the tone set by Caesar.¹⁰ When Cicero reiterates his request at the opening of section three, he addresses Caesar as "mi Caesar," and when he specifies—by refusing to specify—what he has in mind for Caesar to do for Trebatius, he goes to some trouble to avoid sounding insistent, importunate, or at all precise: "I do not seek for him a tribunate or prefecture or any other specific benefit. It is your good will and generosity I seek; and yet neither do I stand in your way, should it be pleasing for you to adorn him also with these little marks of glory." (*Huic ego neque tribunatum neque praefecturam neque ullius benefici certum nomen peto; benevolentiam tuam et liberalitatem peto, neque impedio quo minus, si tibi ita placuerit, etiam hisce eum ornes glorio-lae insignibus*, *Fam.* 7.5.3). The diminutive *gloriolae* that Cicero uses here, and the deictic particle *ce* stuck onto *his*, are interesting but somewhat enigmatic markers of tone. Cicero may sound wheedling here, which surely he would not wish.¹¹ His *recusatio*, "I do not seek a . . . specific benefit," is, of course, disingenuous, but the phrasing here conveys an apology for brashness even as Cicero breaches decorum by suggesting specific marks of honor for Trebatius. The center of the sentence returns to decorously vague applications for Caesar's *benevolentia* and *liberalitas*, before ending with "*gloriolae insignibus*." The final diminutive deprecates the requester, as well as the request, as Cicero indicates his awareness of the indelicacy of appearing to dictate favors. He seems to suggest that his rhetorical overexuberance can lead to regrettable, but surely excusable, transgressions of social decorum. He alludes to an earlier letter from Caesar that had mocked (*lusisti*) Cicero's over-elaborate praise for Milo, and he modulates his praise for Trebatius in the present letter accordingly. Moreover, he apologizes for the neat compliment that he delivers at the finale of his request, in case it may seem overdone: "In sum, I am putting the whole man, as the phrase goes, from my hand into yours—a hand outstanding both in victory and trustworthiness, if I may be a bit fulsome, though that is scarcely permitted with you. But it will be permitted, as I see." (*Totum denique hominem tibi ita*



trado, de manu, ut aiunt, in manum tuam istam et victoria et fide praestantem; simus enim putidiusculi, quod per te vix licet; verum, ut video, licebit, 7.5.3.)

The phrase “from my hand into yours” is particularly suggestive.¹² Cicero implies that in sending the talented Trebatius to Caesar, he is making him over as a gift. But even though he represents himself as the giver, in fact Cicero is mostly stuck on the receiving end of this exchange, getting more indebted to Caesar each time he sends a Curtius or Trebatius up to Gaul. As in the letter to Appius, Cicero writes this exchange of favors with Caesar into an ongoing series of mutually beneficial actions. He does so in this letter by reminding Caesar of his generosity to Curtius, and apparently to Milo. However, no matter how eloquent Cicero’s letters are, this account is seriously out of balance. In the long run, the protégés whom Cicero sends to Caesar might well benefit Caesar the most. Thus, given enough time, the balance of this exchange might shift into Cicero’s favor. But in the short term Caesar was in a position to grant favors, and Cicero repeatedly needed to request them. In a gift economy, “a man possesses in order to give. But he also possesses by giving. A gift that is not returned can become a debt, a lasting obligation; and the only recognized power—recognition, personal loyalty or prestige—is the one that is obtained by giving.”¹³ Cicero is, and will remain, predominantly on the receiving end in his relationship with Caesar. This imbalance in giving and receiving may well be an important contributing cause to the uneasily facetious tone of his recommendation of Trebatius.

All in the Family, All in One

The *alterum me* expression overlaps with a third euphemizing tactic: Cicero’s extension of kinship terms to people who are not actually his relatives.¹⁴ In *The Gender of the Gift*, Marilyn Strathern proposes two kinds of relationships arising from and expressed through the exchange of gifts and labor. *Direct exchanges* are so called because they take place within the household, a sphere in which “the fact of relatedness may be taken for granted (as between kinsmen), but work makes specific relations visible—kinsmen do things for one another as kinsmen should, as spouses work with each other in mind as spouses should.”¹⁵ Direct exchange has no need for euphemism or misrecognition, because there is no gift—there is simply the work that goes on within a household to maintain that household. Opposed to direct exchange is *mediated exchange*, which describes transactions beyond the bounds of the household. These exchanges require euphemism or misrecognition to support the fiction of voluntary, disinterested gift exchange. All of Cicero’s correspondence *ad familiares* documents and partakes in mediated, rather than direct, exchange, but Cicero not

infrequently euphemizes by referring to his addressees as though they were family.¹⁶ In a letter to Marcus Licinius Crassus in which Cicero reports on his diligence in the senate on behalf of Crassus's interests, and pledges his continued friendship, he adduces as proof of his devotion to his addressee the affection that Crassus's son Publius has for him; P. Crassus regards Cicero as *alterum parentum* (*Fam.* 5.8 [25]). Cicero also figures himself as a virtual father to the younger Gaius Curio in a letter of sympathy for the loss of his actual father: "In me you may be sure of having one to whom you are as dear and delightful as you were to your father." (*Me certe habebis cui et carus aequae sis et iucundus ac fuisti patri*, 2.2 [46]).¹⁷ Similarly, in a letter to C. Memmius requesting a favor, Cicero refers to Atticus as "another brother." Specifically, he cites affection for Atticus as the chief reason for his own interference in Memmius's affairs: "I love Pomponius Atticus as another brother; nothing is more dear to me nor brings me more pleasure than he does." (*Pomponium Atticum sic amo ut alterum fratrem; nihil est illo mihi nec carius nec iucundius*, 13.1.5 [63].) By figuring his relationship to Atticus as a close kinship tie, Cicero subtly excuses his meddling in relations between Memmius and Atticus. As a brother, he is duty-bound to look after Atticus's interests without considering his own expenditure of effort. Thus, Memmius's act of consideration for Atticus may be received entirely as a favor for Atticus, without any credit or debt accruing to Cicero's account from either side. The kinship claim allows Cicero to take himself out of this exchange, even as he attempts to engineer its success. In all these letters, Cicero extends kinship relations metaphorically as a euphemizing tactic that veils self-interest by representing the exchanges in which he engages with these correspondents as though they were direct exchanges between members of a single household.

For an example of how the *alterum me* expression also euphemizes mediated exchanges, we can look to a letter from Cicero to Brutus. The letter opens, "You have Messala" (*Messalam habes*, *Ad Brut.* 23.1 [23]). Messala has brought Cicero's letter to Brutus and, with it, an oral message about the situation at Rome that Cicero deems too sensitive or too subtly complex to write down. Cicero goes on to praise Messala at length, and then writes: "Although I am distressed by sending this man away from myself, I take consolation in this fact—namely, that he is setting out toward you as if toward another me." (*Quem cum a me dimittens graviter ferrem, hoc levabar uno, quod ad te tamquam ad alterum me proficiscens*, *Ad Brut.* 23.2). If Brutus is the writer's alter ego, then Cicero can console himself for the loss of Messala by thinking that when Messala reaches Brutus, Cicero more or less has Messala back again. This conceit is the extreme version of representing mediated exchange as if it were direct—pretending that the exchange is not an exchange, but continued possession.¹⁸



Something similar occurs in a letter that Cicero writes to Appius Claudius Pulcher from Cilicia upon receiving the good news that Appius has been acquitted of a politically motivated *maiestas* charge.

De qua etsi permulto ante certior factus eram litteris nuntiis fama denique ipsa . . . tamen eadem illa laetiora fecerunt mihi tuae litterae, non solum quia planius loquebantur et uberius quam vulgi sermo sed etiam quia magis videbar tibi gratulari cum de te ex te ipso audiebam. Complexus igitur sum cogitatione te absentem, epistulam vero osculatus etiam ipse mihi gratulatus sum; quae enim <a> cuncto populo, a senatu, a iudicibus ingenio industriae virtuti tribuuntur, quia mihi ipse adsentor fortasse cum ea esse in me fingo, mihi quoque ipsi tribui puto. (*Fam.* 3.11.1–2 [74])

Although I had been informed of [your acquittal] much earlier by letters and oral messages and by general report, nevertheless your letter made these tidings all the happier for me, not only because it spoke more clearly and with more detail than the common talk, but also because I seemed to be congratulating you more as I heard about you from you yourself. So in my mind, although you were absent, I embraced you, then I even kissed the letter, wishing myself joy as well as you. As for the tribute paid by the whole people and the senate and the jury to your talent, energy, and virtue, since I flatter myself perhaps in imagining that these qualities are in me, I think that tribute has also been paid to me.

Appius's letter to Cicero receives the affectionate salutation that Cicero would have bestowed on its author, had Appius been present. Even more striking, however, is the ease with which Cicero turns his pleasure in praise for Appius toward himself ("etiam ipse mihi gratulatus sum . . . mihi . . . ipsi tribui puto"). Just as Cicero manages to keep possession of Messala by sending him to Brutus, he counts as his own the success that Appius's good qualities have gained at Rome. After Appius's letter is figured as a proxy for its writer, Appius himself is more subtly represented as a mirror for Cicero, who sees his own admirable traits reflected and rewarded in his friend. This passage illustrates how the *alterum me* trope could be artfully extended. It also suggests how easily the Aristotelian definition of an ideal friend as another self, which Cicero would endorse several years later in his *De amicitia*, could in rhetorical practice be given a self-serving twist.¹⁹

Persons and Objects (*Fam.* 7.29 [264])

The letters treated in this chapter so far have concerned the transfer of persons (namely, Trebatius and Messalla) between correspondents, rather than the

transfer of objects. Appius's letter, in which an object briefly is treated as though it were a person, is an important exception. But after persons, books were the objects that most often accompanied and complemented the gift exchange of letters. Interestingly, in a number of letters that accompany books, the books are referred to *as if* they were persons. For a Roman reader, this was probably not as far-fetched a conceit as we might find it, since titles were often names (e.g., Cicero's *Brutus*, *Cato Maior*, and *Laelius*).²⁰ Letters can be personified, too, as is the letter from Caesar (mentioned at *Fam.* 7.5.2 [26]) that Cicero calls a witness (*testis*) and a guarantor (*sponsor*) of Caesar's liberality.

Personification is a euphemizing tactic that works by alleviating some responsibility from the letter-writer who wishes to nudge an exchange along. Cicero can pretend that he will never have to hold Caesar directly to account, so long as he has the sponsorship and testimony of Caesar's letters. Likewise, when Cicero sends Varro the four books of his *Academica* (a work in which Varro is a prominent character), he puts onto the shoulders of his personified books the indelicate task of reminding Varro that he owes Cicero something in return:²¹

Etsi munus flagitare, quamvis quis ostenderit, ne populus quidem solet nisi concitatus, tamen ego exspectatione promissi tui moveor ut admoneam te, non ut flagitem. Misi autem ad te quattuor admonitores non nimis verecundos; nosti enim profecto os huius adulescentioris Academiae. Ex ea igitur media excitationis misi; qui metuo ne te forte flagitent, ego autem mandavi ut rogarent. (*Fam.* 9.8.1 [254])

Although unless they are provoked, not even the mob is accustomed to demand a gift, however much someone has promised it, nevertheless, awaiting the fulfillment of your promise, I am so moved as to remind you, but not to make demands. Thus I have sent four monitors to you, not particularly modest ones. For you certainly know the impudence of this younger Academy. Well, I have sent you a group roused out from its headquarters. They, I fear, may perhaps make demands, although I have instructed them just to ask.

Instead of representing a mediated exchange as though it were direct, in this letter Cicero euphemizes by creatively multiplying the parties involved in the exchange. Similarly, he opens a letter sent to C. Trebonius, serving in Spain, as if it were accompanying a human protégé: "I commend my 'Orator' to you" ("Oratorem" meum . . . commendavi, *Fam.* 15.20 [208]). The artfully wrought conclusion of a letter to the Stoic and senator M. Porcius Cato, requesting his vote for military honors in recognition of Cicero's conduct as governor of Cilicia (a triumph, preferably, though Cicero is careful not to specify), produces



Philosophy herself as a final pleader for Cicero's cause. Here, instead of a specific text, a whole subject area is at the same time rendered a token of exchange between correspondents and personified. Philosophy intervenes appropriately, Cicero writes, because she is a subject equally dear to him and to Cato:

Haec igitur, quae mihi tecum communis est, societas studiorum atque artium nostrarum, quibus a pueritia dediti ac devincti soli prope modum nos philosophiam veram illam et antiquam, quae quibusdam oti esse ac desidiae videtur, in forum atque in rem publicam atque in ipsam aciem paene deduximus, tecum agit de mea laude; cui negari a Catone fas esse non puto. (*Fam.* 15.4.16 [110])

This alliance, then, of our interests and pursuits, which is shared by me and you, to which from boyhood we have been devoted and bound—nearly we alone have led this true and ancient philosophy, which to certain people seems a subject for leisure and amusement, into the forum and into public affairs and almost even into the line of battle—she pleads with you about my merit, one whom I do not think it right for Cato to refuse.

The ease and frequency with which personification happens in Cicero's letters makes the last letter we will consider here seem all the more peculiar. Its writer, Manius Curius, takes an entirely different approach to euphemizing a mediated exchange. He does not attempt to present his regard for Cicero as disinterested friendship, nor does he disguise the fact that his rhetoric is aimed at facilitating the circulation of favors that will benefit him. His euphemizing instead is devoted to covering over a breach of etiquette, the abrogation of an established exchange relationship with Atticus in favor of a shortcut through Cicero. Manius tries to euphemize his violation of polite discourse and behavior not by personification but, instead, by objectification.

Manius Curius, a client of Atticus, wrote to Cicero in October of 45 asking him to send a letter to the incoming governor of Achaëa, in order, we infer, to ensure Manius's safe passage to Rome. Manius was a businessman based in Patrae, on the Gulf of Corinth ("qui Patris negotiatur," *Fam.* 13.50 [266]). He was not an aristocrat. Although he addresses Cicero as "amice magne," he also calls him "mi patrone." In his reply Cicero does not call Manius *amicus*.²² Nor does he refer to Manius as a friend in the recommendation letter that he subsequently sends to Acilius, the governor-elect of Achaia, although he does mention that he and Manius have exchanged many *officia*, and characterizes their relationship as one of mutual affection ("summus inter nos amor et mutuus").

Interestingly, Manius asks that Cicero not mention his request to Atticus.

(Cicero apparently acceded.) This explicit plea suggests that ordinary etiquette dictated that Manius should ask a favor *of* Cicero *through* Atticus. Writing directly to Cicero short-circuited an established relationship and could be construed as a slight against Atticus. Manius's awareness of his breach of the unspoken rules of exchange may well have motivated the remarkable rhetoric of his letter. Here is how it begins:

CURIUS M. CICERONI SUO S.

"Suo"; sum enim χρήσει μὲν tuus, κτήσει δὲ Attici nostri. Ergo fructus est tuus, mancipium illius; quod quidem si inter senes comptionalis venale proscripserit, egerit non multum. At illa nostra praedicatio quanti est, nos quod simus, quod habeamus, quod homines existimemur, id omne abs te habere! (*Fam.* 7.29.1 [264])

MANIUS CURIUS GREET'S HIS OWN CICERO

I write "his own," for I am yours to use, though I am the inalienable possession of our friend Atticus. For I am a source of profit for you, but I belong to him; though if he were to advertise me for sale in a job lot (as is done for old men), he would not make much. But the proclamation that I make is worth something—namely, that what I am, what I possess, and what others think of me is all owed to you!

In the letter's first line, Manius explicitly figures himself as property, and, what is more, as property possessed, in different ways, by Cicero and Atticus. He extends the metaphor in the following sentence. Most striking, perhaps, is his use of the word *mancipium*, a legal term for a type of ownership that was often used metonymically to designate a slave.²³ Manius figures himself as a worn-out old slave, not worth selling individually, and unlikely to fetch much even as part of a group. It seems that Manius hopes to overcome his breach of social form by figurative language that renders his action playful and urbane. We have seen Cicero declare to Appius that the profit (*fructum*) of friendship should be friendship itself (*Fam.* 3.13.2 [76]). Manius, recognizing that he is too humble to qualify for *amicitia*, instead offers himself and his enthusiastic advertisement of gratitude directly as the benefit or profit (*fructus*) of his dealings with Cicero.

Manius proceeds to make his specific request of Cicero, and then asks that Cicero not show this letter to Atticus, thereby revealing that he is well aware of the rule he is breaking. Manius extends his plea with phrasing apparently borrowed from a folk saying: "But, my great friend, don't show this letter to Atticus. Let him remain in the dark, let him think that I am a good man who would not whitewash two walls from the same pot." (Sed, amice magne, noli



hanc epistulam Attico ostendere. Sine eum errare et putare me virum bonum esse nec solere duo parietes de eadem fidelia dealbare, *Fam.* 7.29.2.)

The tone of this letter is much closer to Cicero's recommendation of Trebatius to Caesar (*Fam.* 7.5 [26]) than to the subtler maneuvers of Cicero's letter to Appius. Social anxiety could well be the inspiration for Manius's unusual rhetoric. Compared with that of Cicero, his mastery of the mores of correspondence may well be imperfect, reflecting a different degree of education and experience in this kind of exchange. For Manius, objectifying himself could have been an act of bravado. On the other hand, his unusual rhetorical tactics may indicate a canny awareness of the difference in status between himself and his "great friends," and may in fact be a means of acknowledging and coping with that difference. He can never hope to repay Cicero with a similar letter of introduction to a man as powerful as the governor of Achaia, just as Cicero will never provide a slate of potentially lucrative and glorious job openings for friends of Caesar. Looking at *Fam.* 7.5 [26] and this letter, we might hypothesize that the further out of balance an exchange of gifts gets—that is, the more indebted one party is to the other, and the less likely the restoration of an even balance—the harder the writer's euphemizing rhetoric works to disguise or distract from the imbalance. Manius's frank declaration that he is worth something to Cicero may be just outrageous enough to be charming, as may his admission that what he is worth consists of his eagerness to advertise Cicero's generosity. We have seen from the opening of *Fam.* 3.13 [76] that Cicero was quite capable of supplying this sort of advertisement for himself in correspondence with a patrician addressee who was politically an equal but undoubtedly regarded himself as Cicero's social superior. There, Cicero testifies to how hard his friend Appius has worked to benefit him. In his correspondence with Appius, Cicero labors to maintain the appearance of an easy, voluntary, and mutually satisfying friendship. With Manius, in contrast, Cicero remains indubitably the patron, permanently ensconced in the more powerful position.

Manius's daring rhetorical gambit apparently succeeded, at least with Cicero. No letter survives to document Atticus's reaction to the exchange, or to inform us of whether he ever discovered that Manius had painted "two walls from one pot." We have more evidence for continued relations between Cicero and Trebatius Testa, the protégé intended to benefit from Cicero's recommendation to Caesar. In that case, a series of alternately soothing and scolding letters to Trebatius makes it clear that Cicero could not fully assuage Trebatius's complaint that Caesar had not welcomed him to Gaul with the warmth he felt his merits deserved. Letters, even Cicero's letters, could only do so much, and Caesar, perhaps more than anyone else in his milieu, recognized that the

unspoken rules of gift exchange, as well as any others, are made to be broken, especially if the rule-breaker acts with sufficient confidence and panache. Under different circumstances, Cicero too was willing to ignore the etiquette of correspondence. In the next chapter, we will consider an episode in which Cicero is the recalcitrant party, unable or unwilling to cede to the epistolary maneuvers of Servius Sulpicius Rufus.

2



CONSOLATION AND COMPETITION

“I have received a consolatory letter from Caesar sent April 30th from Hispalis.” (A Caesare litteras accepi consolatorias datas prid. Kal. Mai. Hispalis, *Att.* 13.20 [328].) So begins a letter to Atticus written at the beginning of July 45, about five months after the death of Cicero’s daughter, Tullia. For Cicero, the arrival of a letter of consolation from Caesar is not only worthy of mention, but is worth mentioning first of all. The prominence that Cicero gives this news testifies to the social significance of receiving a letter of consolation from a highly placed person, although circumstances may have exaggerated the effect, since his military and political preeminence made Caesar not just a VIP but the most powerful Roman of all. Unfortunately, Caesar’s consolatory letter to Cicero has not survived. But a number of other consolatory letters are dispersed throughout the collection *Epistulae ad familiares*.¹ They are easily recognized by the philosophical commonplaces, or *topoi*, that they invariably include.² In the *Tusculan Disputations*, written between six months and a year after Tullia’s death, Cicero contends that bereavement is the most difficult misfortune to assuage, but he credits the Greeks with composing consolations for a whole catalogue of other misfortunes as well: poverty, obscurity, exile, the destruction of one’s country, slavery, ill health, blindness, and every form of disaster (3.81). Consolation could take several forms. The Academic philosopher Crantor of Soli (c. 335–275 BC) wrote a short epistle or treatise titled “To Pythocles, on the Death of His Children, about Grief.”³ Cicero addressed an essay of this kind, which is no longer extant, to himself, and boasted in a letter to Atticus that he was the first person to do so.⁴ Catullus’s poem 68 presents itself as a letter

written in response to a request for consolation, and the third book of Lucretius's epic *De rerum natura*, which argues against the fear of death, is sometimes characterized as an Epicurean consolation. All these works have in common with ordinary letters a specific second-person addressee, the person who is to be consoled. In fact, correspondence was a particularly practical means for conveying sympathy and advice, given that eminent men were likely to be far separated when news of a friend's misfortune reached them. The considerable number of consolatory letters in the extant corpus of Cicero's letters, especially those written to political exiles, probably is partially due to the extraordinary events of 60 to 43 BC. As the republic collapsed, there were many misfortunes to condole.

This chapter deals with letters that console or respond to consolation for deaths and political misfortunes. These letters are fully embedded in the social economy; they are gifts. As such they knit together and maintain social bonds, but their movements create disequilibrium. As the gift moves, the relative position of participants in its exchange shifts. The reactions to these normal shifts in status are often felt and expressed as rivalry, despite the fact that all participants in a gift's circulation actually stand to benefit. While a number of Cicero's epistolary consolations have survived without a response, these single letters nonetheless demonstrate how easily the rhetorical creation of shared interests between author and addressee shifts into competitive language. Cicero's consolation to Titius (*Fam.* 5.16 [187]) on the death of his sons, the sole letter preserved to this correspondent, issues challenges to its addressee and meets his imagined objections in a rhetorical vein that is matched by the fuller picture revealed by the few consolatory exchanges contained in the *Ad familiares*. Series of letters that include a consolation and its reply are especially valuable, enabling us to observe the contribution of both correspondents to the exchange. But all of Cicero's letters of consolation use eristic rhetoric to endorse and stimulate traditional Roman virtues, particularly self-control. These letters are aligned with the kind of ideal friendship that Cicero sets forth in the *De amicitia*, in which true friends are exemplars of virtue for one another.

The Basic Model: Consolation for Bereavement (*Fam.* 5.16 [187])

Cicero's declaration to Atticus that Caesar's consolatory letter has arrived suggests that a correspondent's moral authority or political eminence might lend extra weight to the commonplaces of consolatory rhetoric. The reassuring prestige that a prominent correspondent could provide may explain why Cicero wrote a letter of consolation to a man otherwise virtually unknown to us.⁵ The



letter itself gives almost no information about Titius or his family. Even the fact that he has lost his sons must be inferred.⁶ This lack of detail could suggest either that Cicero did not know his addressee well but considered it socially prudent to write him a letter of consolation, or that inclusion of personal information about the deceased was not characteristic of consolatory letters. To judge from the other consolations contained or mentioned in the Ciceronian corpus, both inferences are plausible.⁷ But if consolatory letters were a means of self-promotion, of maintaining friendships, and of garnering increased prestige, then the inclusion of personal information about the *deceased* would not advance their real aim. Personal information, if we find it, is more likely to describe the letter's reader and its writer.

Cicero's letter to Titius opens by establishing connections between himself and his addressee. He begins with a declaration of his own grief:

Etsi unus ex omnibus minime sum ad te consolandum accommodatus, quod tantum ex tuis molestiis cepi doloris, ut consolatione ipse egerem, tamen, cum longius a summi luctus acerbitate meus abesset dolor quam tuus, statui nostrae necessitudinis esse meaeque in te benevolentiae non tacere tanto in tuo maerore tam diu sed adhibere aliquam modicam consolationem, quae levare dolorem tuum posset si minus sanare potuisset. (*Fam.* 5.16.1 [187])

Even though I am least suitable of all to console you, since I am so distressed by your troubles that I need consolation myself, nevertheless, since my distress is further from the utmost sharpness of sorrow than yours, I have decided that it befits our relationship and my good will toward you not to stay quiet in the face of your sadness for so long but to apply some moderate consolation, which may be able to alleviate your distress even if it cannot heal it.

The opening of another Ciceronian consolation, a letter addressed to a political exile, is very similar: "I, although I wish to console you, need consolation myself" (*Etsi egomet, qui te consolari cupio, consolandus ipse sum, Fam.* 5.18 [51]). G. O. Hutchinson has drawn attention to Cicero's use of the "unconsolated consoler" device at the end of a letter from exile to Terentia: "I, who strengthen you, am not able to help myself" (*ego, qui te confirmo, ipse me non possum, 14.4.5 [6]*).⁸ Like the *me alterum* trope discussed in chapter 1, through which Cicero suggests an identity of interest between writer and addressee, the opening sentences of his consolatory letters establish or reaffirm a rapport that is based on their shared grief.

Cicero's declaration of shared grief at the opening of his consolation to Titius presents an apparent liability because it puts him in need of comforting himself. Actually, however, it confers a rhetorical and pragmatic advantage

by connecting him more closely to his addressee. Since he understands Titius's pain, he is well positioned to soothe it. Cicero's omission of the source of Titius's grief in this opening sentence might be simply tactful; Titius knows what he has lost. Yet over the course of the letter Cicero never mentions the boys' names, let alone any personal or even conventional details about their affection for or loyalty toward their father or their youthful ambitions and potential. Instead, Cicero offers other consolations that he admits are common (*pervulgata*): we should always remember that we are mortal, all humans live under this law of nature, and we should bear up under the necessity of death by keeping in mind the fact that death is nothing new (*Fam.* 5.16.2 [187]).⁹ Besides, the deceased have either attained immortality, which is no cause for lament, or they have ceased to exist, in which case they feel no pain.

Cicero's nearest approach to particularity is his argument from the grim state of affairs in Rome (*Fam.* 5.16.3–4 [187]), although surely he exaggerates when he declares that people who have never had children and those who have lost them in these dire times must feel less grief than if they had lost the same children in a well-run republic. He even claims that he has considered each young person's death in this terrible, plague-ridden year as a rescue by the gods, not only from misery but from a life in which all the odds were against him (5.16.4 [187]). Describing death as an escape from the ills of the failing republic was not a Ciceronian invention, however. Cicero was the recipient of similar consolation from Servius Sulpicius Rufus, who offered a series of rhetorical questions designed to show how little potential happiness was left for Tullia after the demise of the republic (4.5.3 [248]). In a series of political consolations addressed to Aulus Manlius Torquatus, who was residing in Athens (e.g., *Fam.* 6.1.1 [242]), Cicero makes a similar point: it is so hard to witness the destruction of Rome that those who are removed from the scene may even be considered fortunate.

Throughout the letter to Titius, Cicero deftly mingles philosophical topoi with appeals to traditional Roman standards of self-restraint. But flattery and shaming are most prominent in the latter part of the letter, when, after offering the usual reasons why Titius should not grieve for the deceased on *their* behalf, Cicero explains why Titius should not feel sorry for himself. He suggests that Titius's longtime reputation for good sense (*gravitas* and *sapientia*) is now at risk, and he stresses the need to appear consistent: "Indeed, you have shown yourself [a man of sense] in both private and public matters, so [now] you must look after your firm character and be obedient to constancy." (*Etenim eum semper te et privatis in rebus et publicis praestitisti tuenda tibi ut sit gravitas et constantiae serviendum, Fam.* 5.16.5 [187].) In the penultimate paragraph, Cicero claims that mourning threatens not only his addressee's reputation for prudence but even his manhood:



Etenim si nulla fuit umquam [si] liberis amissis tam imbecillo mulier animo quae non aliquando lugendi modum fecerit, certe nos, quod est dies adlatura, id consilio ante adferre debemus neque expectare temporis medicinam, quam repraesentare ratione possimus. (*Fam.* 5.16.6 [187])¹⁰

For if there was never even a woman so weak in mind that when she had lost her children she did not put a limit on grieving, certainly we [men] ought to anticipate by resolution what the passing days will bring, nor should we await the medicine of time, which we can anticipate by reason.

After this climax, Cicero concludes. The letter's final sentence confirms his confidence in the power of his consolatory rhetoric, as well as trust in his representation of Titius as a prudent, self-restrained man like himself who will appreciate the continuance of normal courtesies (*officia*) even under duress:

His ego litteris si quid profecissem existimabam optandum quiddam me esse adsecutum; sin minus forte valuissent, officio tamen esse functum viri benevolentissimi atque amicissimi. Quem me tibi et fuisse semper existimes velim et futurum esse confidas. (*Fam.* 5.16.6 [187])

If I have accomplished anything by this letter, I reckon that I have attained something to be wished for. But if, perhaps, it has not been effective, nevertheless I have performed the duty of a most well-disposed and affectionate man, which I hope you consider me always to have been and trust that I will continue to be.

We do not know how Titius reacted to Cicero's letter. He may have found it a "soothing and comforting" piece marked by tact, smoothness, and strength, as Hutchinson suggests,¹¹ or he may have been flattered by the eminence of its author but unmoved by his rhetoric. He may have written back, or not. This letter gives us a taste of consolatory rhetoric, but because of its lack of context, it gives us little idea of the etiquette of consolatory correspondence. For instance, we cannot reasonably judge from this lone text whether it would be considered courteous or discourteous for Titius to reply. Ordinarily, one letter requests and begets another, but in the case of consolation, writing a reply might suggest that the previous letter's solace was ineffective. To reply to consolation may even have appeared tantamount to the refusal of a gift. On the other hand, it is possible that Titius responded to Cicero's letter, and a note of thanks for a consolatory letter may have been appreciated, if not regularly expected. It is also difficult to ascribe motives for Cicero's letter to Titius, beyond the likelihood that Cicero's status required him to produce, and was bolstered by

producing, this kind of seemingly gratuitous correspondence. In his analysis of gift exchange, Bourdieu reminds his reader to take account of practices that make “continuity out of discontinuity, as mathematicians do, through infinite addition of the infinitely small, in the ‘little gifts’ that are said to ‘bind in friendship.’”¹² By performing its stated aim of offering consolation to Titius’s grief, Cicero’s letter reaffirms an ongoing bond between the consoler and the consoled. Without further contextual information, however, it is difficult to estimate how important the relationship was to either partner, or whether Cicero may have wished to accomplish some specific aim beyond his general practice of keeping connections strong. Thus, we turn next to two series of consolatory letters whose practical political motivations we may deduce with reasonable confidence. Written to adherents of Pompey who remained in exile after the defeat of their cause, Cicero’s consolatory letters are anxious to exercise whatever influence their author retains.

Consolations for Political Loss

These consolatory letters are not as contextually forlorn as the letter to Titius. Several letters to Marcus Claudius Marcellus, consul in 51 BC (*Fam.* 4.7–10, 15.9 [230, 229, 231, 233, 101]), and one letter from him (4.11[232]) are included in the collection *Ad familiares*. Although no letter addressed to Cicero from Aulus Manlius Torquatus survives, a series of Cicero’s letters to him are extant (6.1–4 [242, 245, 243, 244]). These letters console their addressees, but in the case of Marcellus, Cicero also pursues a more specific aim. He wishes for Marcellus to accept Caesar’s pardon and return to Rome.¹³ In the case of Torquatus, for whom pardon was not yet assured, Cicero’s persuasive aims are necessarily more general, but his advice on regaining and maintaining equanimity is both considerably more prolonged than in the letter to Titius and tailored more distinctively to Torquatus’s circumstances. These letters illustrate especially well the interpenetration of art and social negotiation in Ciceronian letters. They demonstrate the rhetorical force Cicero was able to achieve in his communications with specific correspondents in pursuit of pragmatic aims by close, skillful interweaving of the conventional consolatory content and formal epistolary traits that were at his disposal with the details of an individual’s specific circumstances. The rhetoric and etiquette of epistolary consolation are visible in these letters, recognizable by means of their consolatory topoi, the epistolary preoccupation with presence and absence, and concern for both correspondents’ status, but as Cicero shaped these markers of genre and social function to suit his purposes, these elements are shown to be extremely malleable.

We turn first to a consolatory letter to M. Claudius Marcellus, a conservative



opponent of Caesar who had been living in exile since the Pompeian defeat at Pharsalus. Cicero's first sentence in the initial letter presents an alternative to opening a consolation by establishing a connection through the shared experience of grief, as his letter to Titius had. Instead, he opens by complimenting his addressee. In further contrast to the Titius letter, Cicero begins by expressly denying any attempt to console his distinguished correspondent:

Neque monere te audeo, praestanti prudentia virum, nec confirmare, maximi animi hominem unumque fortissimum, consolari vero nullo modo. Nam si ea quae acciderunt ita fers ut audio, gratulari magis virtuti debeo quam consolari dolorem tuum. (*Fam.* 4.8.1 [229])

I neither dare advise you, a man of outstanding wisdom, nor encourage you, a person supremely great-hearted and brave. Indeed, by no means do I dare console you. For if you endure what has happened as I hear, I ought to congratulate your virtue rather than console your distress.

Yet after opening with this complimentary refusal, Cicero immediately goes on to offer both advice and consolation.¹⁴ Just as it was gratifying to *receive* letters of consolation from important men, to *address* consolations to the great would satisfy also, by providing the opportunity to display a prestigious connection, to make it closer, and to identify with the eminent recipient. For Cicero does liken himself to Marcellus, although he waits until the close of the second sentence to do so: "But if the very great misfortunes of the republic do trouble you, I am not so rich in genius that I can console you when I am unable to console myself" (*sin te tanta mala rei publicae frangunt, non ita abundo ingenio ut te consoler cum ipse me non possim*).

The consolatory letters to Marcellus make notable use of the aristocratic concern for maintaining public visibility, blending this social priority with recurrent epistolary emphasis on presence and absence. In the second and third letters in the series (*Fam.* 4.7 [230] and 4.9 [231]), Cicero turns a number of times to an objection that Marcellus may have made in his response to Cicero's first letter, although Cicero may also be anticipating the point—namely, that in Rome Marcellus would be a forced witness of many sorrowful and distressing sights that he may avoid by remaining in Athens. Cicero repeatedly assures Marcellus that so far his policy of remaining abroad has been widely approved, but that now his intention to return to Rome would be as widely welcomed: "All who esteem you agree on this plan—a vast throng, as befits your very great and extremely well-known virtues." (*Hoc idem omnes qui te diligunt sentiunt; quorum est magna pro tuis maximis clarissimisque virtutibus multitudo*, 4.7.4

[230].) In addition to adducing the opinion of Marcellus's friends and family, Cicero uses other persuasive tactics. He overturns the potential objection that the sight of Rome downtrodden is better avoided by personifying Rome's distress at the absence of her best citizens: "Now, truly, no place should be dearer to you than your homeland, nor should you cherish her less because she is cast down, but rather you should pity her, and not deprive her, bereft of many brilliant men, also of the sight of you." (Nunc vero nec locus tibi ullus dulcior esse debet patria nec eam diligere minus debes quod deformior est, sed misereri potius nec eam multis claris viris orbatam privare etiam aspectu tuo, 4.9.3 [231].)

Each letter in this series to Marcellus shares a pattern. Cicero begins by saying that he will not or cannot console his addressee, because it would be wrong or impossible to patronize such a great man as Marcellus. Then he goes on in the body of the letter to do what he has just disavowed. He consoles, then he advises. Then he apologizes, or nearly apologizes, for overstepping (or nearly overstepping) the bounds of propriety in his eagerness to assist. He then ends the letter not with advice or consolation, either of which might appear to display insufficient respect for his addressee, but with a declaration of support. *Fam.* 4.8 [229] closes thus: "But I have written more than I had intended. I return, therefore, to this one point: I am yours. I will be among your allies, so long as they are your allies. In any case, I certainly will act in all matters in accord with our connection and our affection." (Sed plura quam statueram. Redeo ergo ad unum illud, me tuum esse; fore cum tuis, si modo erunt tui; si minus, me certe in omnibus rebus satis nostrae coniunctioni amorique facturum, 4.8.2.)¹⁵ The final sentences of *Fam.* 4.7 [230] and 4.9 [231] also expatiate on the nature of Cicero's connection with Marcellus; Cicero represents his concern for his friend as virtually familial: "Here the worries of one man, the many ready tears of one man, Gaius Marcellus, best of brothers,¹⁶ plead for you. I am next to him in care and in distress. . . . I am ready to do all that I can." (Hic te unius sollicitudines, unius etiam multae ad adsiduae lacrimae, C. Marcelli, fratri optimi, deprecantur. Nos cura et dolore proximi sumus. . . . Ad omnia parati sumus, 4.7.6.) "Your safety is as great a care for me as for Marcellus your brother—I wish to be his equal, or at least as close to it as possible." (Mihi salus tua tantae curae est ut Marcello, fratri tuo, aut par aut certe proximus sim, 4.9.4.) By making explicit his alliance with Marcellus's closest kin, Cicero reemphasizes both the strength of his concern and the close identification of their interests.

Cicero's consolatory letters to Aulus Manlius Torquatus also end with simple declarations of support. But Cicero's explanations for the extensive passages of advice and consolation in those letters are quite different from his excuses to Marcellus. To Torquatus he gracefully explains, at the opening of *Fam.* 6.3



[243]: “In my earlier letter I was led to write more than the matter demanded out of good will. I know your virtue needs no strengthening by me.” (*Superioribus litteris benevolentia magis adductus quam quo res ita postularer fui longior; neque enim confirmatione nostra egebat virtus tua.*) Similarly, near the end of *Fam.* 6.4 [244] he writes, “I have written much, even rather more than was needed; not loquacity but my good will makes my letters longer” (*haec satis multa, vel plura potius quam necesse fuit; facit autem non loquacitas mea sed benevolentia longiores epistulas, 6.4.4*). Writing to Marcellus, Cicero is more cautious about infringing on his addressee’s pride; his second letter (4.7 [230]) begins with an elaborate sentence indicating his deference to Marcellus’s judgment and explaining the basis on which he has presumed to offer his support.¹⁷

Etsi eo te adhuc consilio usum intellego ut id reprehendere non audeam, non quin ab eo ipse dissentiam sed quod ea te sapientia esse iudicem ut meum consilium non anteponam tuo, tamen et amicitiae nostrae vetustas et tua summa erga me benevolentia, quae mihi iam a pueritia tua cognita est, me hortata est ut ea scriberem ad te quae et saluti tuae conducere arbitrarer et non aliena esse ducere a dignitate. (*Fam.* 4.7.1)

Although I understand what your policy has been to this point so well that I do not dare reproach it—not that I myself do not disagree with it but because I judge you to be possessed of such wisdom that I would not give my policy preference to yours—nevertheless, both the duration of our friendship and your great good will toward me, which you have shown me since your boyhood, have urged me to write to you what I think both will be of use for your well-being and will not be hostile to your worth.

Cicero mentions his good will (*benevolentia*) toward Torquatus, but here he takes careful note of Marcellus’s benevolence toward himself. In doing so, he grants Marcellus the superior position of benefactor, while he himself adopts the stance of the less powerful person who benefits from the assistance of the great man. This flattering stratagem was apparently not needed or, perhaps, appropriate, in the letters to Torquatus. The differences in how Cicero justifies his advice to either addressee may stem in part from their different circumstances; Marcellus’s pardon was assured, Torquatus’s was not.¹⁸ Yet Cicero’s relationship with each man may also have suggested a different tone. Torquatus was praetor in 70, but no further magistracies are attested; he was likely a less august figure than Marcellus, who had held the consulship and was a member of the ancient Claudian clan. Additionally, Torquatus was a longtime friend of Cicero’s friend Atticus. Whether by direct acquaintance or by the mediating influence of Atticus, greater familiarity was permissible. Moreover, Torquatus’s

friendship with Atticus, a confirmed philhellene, may suggest that Torquatus was more amenable to philosophical persuasion, or more interested in philosophical musing for its own sake, than either Marcellus or Titius.

A further suggestion of Torquatus's possible interest in philosophy is found in the letters' contents. Appeals to virtue as a source of consolation are prominent,¹⁹ and the pursuit of virtue is portrayed as an ongoing contest.²⁰ The first letter in the series is especially rich in eristic rhetoric. Cicero writes from Rome, to Torquatus in Athens:

Etsi ea perturbatio est omnium rerum ut suae quemque fortunae maxime pae-
niteat nemoque sit quin ubivis quam ibi ubi sit esse malit, tamen mihi dubium
non est quin hoc tempore bono viro Romae esse miserrimum sit. Nam etsi, quo-
cumque in loco quisquis est, idem est ei sensus et eadem acerbitas ex interitu
rerum et publicarum et suarum, tamen oculi augent dolorem, qui ea quae ceteri
audiunt intueri cogunt nec avertere a miseriis cogitationem sinunt. Qua re, etsi
multarum rerum desiderio te angi necesse est, tamen illo dolore quo maxime te
confici audio, quod Romae non sis, animum tuum libera. Etsi enim cum magna
molestia tuos tuaque desideras, tamen illa quidem quae requiris suum statum
tenent nec melius si tu adesses tenerent nec sunt ullo in proprio periculo; nec
debes tu, cum de tuis cogitas, aut praecipuam aliquam fortunam postulare aut
communem recusare. (*Fam.* 6.I.I [242])

Although this universal upheaval has the result that each man deeply regrets his own fate and no one exists who would not prefer to be anywhere rather than where he is, nevertheless there is no doubt in my mind that at this time the most wretched place for a good man to be is at Rome. For even though—in whatever place a person is—there is the same emotion for him, and the same bitterness from the ruin of both public affairs and his own, nevertheless the eyes increase pain, forcing us to gaze on things that others learn by hearing, and not permitting us to turn away from contemplation of these misfortunes. For this reason, although of course a yearning for many things pains you, nevertheless free your mind from the distress that I hear you are affected by most of all, that you are not at Rome. For although you are very troubled, longing for your household, friends, and property, nonetheless these things that you wish for remain in their usual state, nor would they fare better if you were present, nor are they in any particular danger; nor ought you, when you contemplate your family, either demand some special, alternate fate or refuse the common one.

Cicero opens this letter as he did the consolation to Titius (*Fam.* 5.16), with an *etsi . . . tamen* construction. Hutchinson remarks of this device that “it enables the writer to comment on what he will say, or his act in saying it, and to strike subtle and tactful balances.”²¹ What should we make of the fact that this



device occurs not once, but four times in this opening paragraph to Torquatus? From a pragmatic standpoint, it bespeaks Cicero's concern to address Torquatus courteously. Yet no matter how diplomatically phrased, this paragraph makes an eristic claim: Cicero's situation is more difficult than that of Torquatus. Moreover, the polished rhetoric implies Cicero's equanimity under these difficult circumstances, equanimity that qualifies him to counsel Torquatus, who is in a less difficult situation and yet less able to cope than Cicero. Of course, Cicero would never put the matter so baldly. To do so would be an affront. But the repetition of *etsi . . . tamen* enables him to make the same point with delicacy. The reiteration of polite concessive structures paves the way also for a heavy dose of correction and advice in the paragraph's final sentence ("*nec . . . si tu adesses . . . nec sunt . . . nec debes . . . postulare . . . recusare*").²²

In passing, we may also note the importance in this letter of seeing. Cicero's claim to bearing a more difficult lot than Torquatus rests on this. His eyes are daily assaulted by the misfortunes of Rome, sights that Torquatus is spared. Thus, Cicero's presence in Rome gives him an opportunity to exercise self-control that the absent Torquatus is denied. Yet Torquatus's absence from Rome is also portrayed in the letter's opening as the main source of his distress. Cicero's reassurance on this score consists of a point that might be especially hard for his addressee to take. The contention that a man ought not fret over his absence, because his presence on the scene could do no good for his affairs or family, could be perfectly true, and thus it would be a source of consolation for a perfectly rational reader. And yet to be told that your presence would not be of use might be even less consoling for a Roman aristocrat than for a modern addressee—and I think it would most likely fall flat for the modern reader as well. For a man whose authority in normal circumstances would rest on being seen, this sensible point would need to be put very delicately indeed.

The close of the last of these consolatory letters to Torquatus is consonant with the rest. Cicero pledges his continued support for his friend's interests, but also encourages Torquatus's self-control. Moreover, Cicero represents his continuing good will and his efforts to assist Torquatus in flattering but competitive terms:

Tu velim te, ut debes et soles, tua virtute sustentas. Ego quae te velle quaeque ad te et ad tuos pertinere arbitror omnia studiose diligenterque curabo; quae cum faciam, benevolentiam tuam erga me imitabor, merita non adsequar. Vale.
(*Fam.* 6.4.5 [244])

I hope that you will sustain yourself by your own virtue, as you ought to and are accustomed to do. For my part, I will zealously and thoroughly take care of

all matters for you and yours that you wish me to. When I act thus, I will imitate your good will toward me, though I cannot match your services. Fare well.

With the letters to Marcellus and Torquatus, the interpretive problems caused by the isolation of the letter to Titius are diminished, but not eliminated. We don't have a record of Torquatus's reaction to Cicero's letters, and Marcellus's response is limited—either because he wrote only once and briefly, or else by historical accident or ancient editorial intervention.²³ These letters do give us a better idea of how creatively Cicero used the constraints and the conventions of epistolary consolation, but for a fuller picture of how consolation worked as a reciprocal process, we must turn to the few letters to and from correspondents whom Cicero consoled and by whom he was consoled in turn. Two of these exchanges are markedly more eristic than the third. Cicero's letters to Lucius Luccius end on a conciliatory note, whereas the letters to Ser. Sulpicius Rufus and Marcus Brutus eschew reconciliation in favor of continued dueling for moral, social, and rhetorical superiority. To discover why this is so, we will need to look to the life and work of each correspondent, as well as considering the aristocratic Roman mindset and the place of these particular correspondences in the social economy.

Eristic Consolations

(*Fam.* 4.3, 4.5, 4.6 [202, 248, 249] and *Ad Brut.* 17 [19])

Servius Sulpicius Rufus was the most eminent jurist of his generation, consul in 51, and a longstanding associate of Cicero.²⁴ The two men commiserated through letters after they were both reconciled with Caesar and Servius had been appointed governor of Achaia.²⁵ But their long friendship does not preclude an adversarial tone from repeatedly entering their correspondence. In September of 46 Cicero wrote to Servius commiserating with him over some nonspecific political disappointments (*Fam.* 4.3 [202]). Servius's response is not preserved. However, the consolation that Servius wrote to Cicero after Tullia's death (4.5 [248]) is extant and has long been regarded as especially well crafted.²⁶ The letter dates from about mid-March of 45. It opens conventionally, with a declaration of sympathy that emphasizes how Servius's position resembles Cicero's. Although he is not the bereaved, his grief is nearly as great as Cicero's:

Postea quam mihi renuntiatum est de obitu Tulliae, filiae tuae, sane quam pro eo ac debui graviter molesteque tui communemque eam calamitatem existimavi, qui, si istic adfuissem, neque tibi defuissem coramque meum dolorem tibi



declarassem; etsi genus hoc consolationis miserum atque acerbum est propterea quia per quos ea confieri debet, propinquos ac familiares, ii ipsi pari molestia adficiuntur neque sine lacrimis multis id conari possunt, uti magis ipsi videantur aliorum consolatione indigere quam aliis posse suum officium praestare. (*Fam.* 4.5.1 [248])

After the news concerning the death of Tullia, your daughter, was brought to me, I bore it seriously and sorely, very much as I should have, and I judged this catastrophe shared—I, who if I had been present would not have failed you and would have in your presence declared my distress to you, although this is a poor and bitter sort of consolation because it ought to be obtained from those relations and close friends who are themselves equally afflicted and who cannot attempt to console without many tears, so that they indeed seem more in need of consolation *by* others than able to perform this duty *for* others.

The play on *adsum* and *desum* that Servius uses to lament what might have been (“si adfuissem . . . [nec] defuissem”) if he had been present at the time of Cicero’s loss stresses the inadequacy of epistolary consolation, and the latter part of this lengthy sentence positions Servius more firmly among those *propinqui* and *familiares* who are deeply affected by the same events, and are close at hand to commiserate.²⁷ By emphasizing his own absence, Servius hints at the letter’s role as a surrogate for the author’s person. Although this letter is never personified to the extent of others we will encounter, Servius’s opening gesture may place a tactful distance between the sympathy of the opening paragraph and the severity of what follows. The body of the letter makes stringent demands on Cicero’s self-control, with no concession to anything that might be proposed as an attenuating circumstance. Interwoven with a battery of rhetorical questions and answers to imagined objections, Servius offers conventional consolatory topoi (*Fam.* 4.5.2–3), tailored to the political context of the day, which is itself the gravest misfortune of all, and one that afflicts all members of Cicero’s milieu. He concludes this section: “Truly, it is an evil to lose children. Except this is a worse evil—to undergo the demise of the republic and to endure it.” (At vero malum est liberos amittere; malum, nisi hoc peius est, haec sufferre et perpeti, 4.5.3.)

Servius then inserts a quieter passage, an autobiographical illustration of fortune’s vicissitudes that has garnered special notice for its eloquence. His offer of advice from his own experience is notable also because, through it, he represents himself as an exemplar for his correspondent.

Ex Asia rediens cum ab Aegina Megaram versus navigarem, coepi regiones circumcirca prospicere. Post me erat Aegina, ante me Megara, dextra Piraeus,

sinistra Corinthus, quae oppida quodam tempore florentissima fuerunt, nunc prostrata et diruta ante oculos iacent. Coepi egomet mecum sic cogitare: “hem! nos homunculi indignamur si quis nostrum interiit aut occisus est, quorum vita brevior esse debet, cum uno loco tot oppidum cadavera proiecta iacent? visne tu te, Servi, cohibere et meminisse hominem te esse natum?” Crede mihi, cogitatione ea non mediocriter sum confirmatus. (*Fam.* 4.5.4 [248])

On my return from Asia, while I was sailing from Aegina opposite Megara, I began to look around at the surrounding districts. Behind me was Aegina, before me Megara, on my right Piraeus, on my left Corinth, which were exceedingly prosperous towns at one time, but now lay before my eyes cast down and pulled apart. I began to mull it over with myself in this way: “So are we little men, whose lives ought to be rather short, insulted if one of us perishes or is killed, when the fallen corpses of so many cities lie in one place? Do you not you wish, Servius, to restrain yourself and to remember that you were born a mortal man?” Believe me, I was strengthened not a little by this thought.

The anecdote calls attention to the writer’s most recent service to his country and accomplishes an effective bit of self-fashioning. It also functions indirectly as a reply to the earlier letter in which Cicero listed his own consolations for the political chaos at Rome, the first of which was his own extraordinary former service to the republic and his continuing good conscience (*Fam.* 4.3.1 [202]).

Accordingly, in *Fam.* 4.5 [248] Servius responds to Cicero’s prior claim to exemplarity by making one of his own. By recounting how he scolded himself by name, and benefited from the rebuke, Servius represents his behavior as a model for imitation. His advice invites emulation by its addressee. If Cicero does not meet Servius’s challenge to suppress his grief, he concedes that his friend’s self-control exceeds his own. If he does welcome Servius’s example, he compliments his correspondent. That acquiescence could benefit both parties, the gracious recipient of advice and the beneficent giver, but it admits of a hierarchy of virtue, with Servius as preceptor and Cicero as pupil. Instead of accepting Servius’s advice, and with it the role of the man less versed in virtue, Cicero wrote a letter in which he politely refused to be comforted. In *Fam.* 4.6 [249] he claims an exceptional status for his own catastrophe. He begins by thanking Servius for his well-intended words (*oratio*), his advice (*auctoritas*), and his near-fellowship in grief (“societas paene aegritudinis,” 4.6.1 [249]). But Cicero insists, as he also does in his reply to Luceius, that his grief is exceptional. Unlike exemplary fathers drawn from Republican history, he does not have the refuge of public activity to assuage his grief (4.6.1 [249]).²⁸ The one domestic comfort that was left to him when he was forced to withdraw from public affairs has now also been snatched away, leaving him with no relief either



at home or in the forum (4.6.2 [249]). Hutchinson has remarked on Cicero's "essentially similar" grief at exile and on the loss of his daughter,²⁹ but Cicero's claim to singularity in this letter to Servius, repeated in letters to Atticus, suggests that although the usual means for expressing and mitigating grief were the same for both kinds of misfortune, Cicero felt that something was different now—the quality of the grief, his access to means of recovery, or both. Atticus tried to budge Cicero from his retreat at Astura in the spring of 45 by reporting (several times) that "people are talking" (*Att.* 12.28 [267], 12.38a [279], 12.40 [281]). At first Cicero responded that his conscience mattered more to him than any person's chatter ("mea mihi conscientia pluris est quam omnium sermo," 12.28.2 [267]). Later, he defended his continued withdrawal on the basis of his brisk literary output (12.40 [281]). Luceius had offered Cicero this excuse earlier (*Fam.* 5.14 [251]), but at that time Cicero did not avail himself of it.

Servius seems to have anticipated Cicero's claim to unique and insuperable distress. The second exemplar whom he exhorts Cicero to emulate is not a contemporary or a famous father from the ranks of the virtuous, but Cicero himself. After Servius recounts his own self-admonition—"visne tu te, Servi, cohibere?"—he reprimands Cicero by name. It is not enough to encourage Cicero to emulate someone else; Servius recalls him to his *own* previous standards:

Denique noli te oblivisci Ciceronem esse et eum qui aliis consueris praecipere et dare consilium, neque imitare malos medicos, qui in alienis morbis profitentur tenere se medicinae scientiam, ipsi se curare non possunt, sed potius quae aliis tute praecipere soles ea tute tibi subiace atque apud animum propone. (*Fam.* 4.5.5 [248])

Finally, do not forget that you are Cicero, one who is accustomed both to direct others and to give advice, and do not imitate bad doctors who profess that they have knowledge of medicine in the case of others' diseases but cannot heal themselves. But, instead, set before your mind and establish for yourself the advice you are accustomed to direct toward others.

Servius's admonition is vehement and specific: "do not forget that you are Cicero"! And Cicero, after all, is the sagacious person who two years previously had written to Servius:

Vehementer te esse sollicitum et in communibus miseriis praecipuo quodam dolore angī multi ad nos cottidie deferunt. Quod quamquam minime miror et meum quodam modo agnosco, doleo tamen te sapientia praeditum prope singulari non tuis bonis delectari potius quam alienis malis laborare. (*Fam.* 4.3.1 [202])

That you are badly shaken and that among our shared miseries you are tormented by a kind of extraordinary distress, many people daily report to me. Although I wonder very little at the fact, and I recognize my own distress in certain measure, I grieve nevertheless that you, fortified with practically unparalleled wisdom, are not drawn along by your own goods rather than afflicted by others' evils.

Cicero empathizes with Servius's aggrieved state, but in the next sentence he implies that his own injuries have been most grave: "I believe that no one experienced greater harm from the devastation and plague of the republic than I did." (Me quidem . . . nemini concedo qui maiorem ex perniciē et peste rei publicae molestiam traxerit, *Fam.* 4.3.1 [202].) Cicero relies on the same tactic—namely, incitement to emulation—that Servius will later use. He enumerates his own consolations for the distress caused by the republic's fall, implying that the contents of his self-address might be effectively applied also to Servius's disquiet, and he further suggests that his friend is in danger of falling short of his own standards, or at least his reputation:

tamen et Caesar ipse ita de te iudicat et omnes cives sic existimant, quasi lumen aliquod extinctis ceteris elucere sanctitatem et prudentiam et dignitatem tuam. Haec tibi ad levandas molestias magna esse debent. (*Fam.* 4.3.2 [202])

Yet Caesar himself judges you just as all the citizens reckon: your virtue, good sense, and worthiness shine out like a lamp when others have been quenched. These ought to go a great way toward lessening your worries.

These three letters show how an ongoing friendship was also a campaign waged through letters. There were no absolute winners or losers in these contests; rather, Cicero and Servius use adversarial rhetoric in an epistolary tug-of-war: now to exhort one another, now to enforce behavioral expectations, now to display self-control through eloquence as well as through admirable comportment.

The relief that public duties could provide when the domestic sphere was the source of grief is also at issue in Cicero's exchange of consolations with Marcus Brutus. Brutus first consoled Cicero in 47, apparently by arguing the sufficiency of virtue for happiness in his *De virtute*.³⁰ In his own *Brutus*, Cicero reviews this work glowingly.³¹ But when Cicero reported to Atticus in March 45 that he had received from Brutus a consolation for Tullia's death, he complained that while it was composed "both sensibly and kindly" (et prudenter et amice) it offered no effective comfort (*Att.* 12.13.1 [250], reiterated at 12.14.4 [251]). In fact, Brutus's letter employed a reproachful tone that Cicero still resented when



he characterized it three months later as an [*epistula*] *obiurgatoria*, a scolding or censorious letter (13.6.3 [310]).

It is not clear why the *De virtute* was so well received in 47 whereas the letter written in 45 was not, although several possible reasons come to mind. The *De virtute* probably offered philosophical consolation for a political misfortune. In arguing that duty commanded patriots to cherish the republic in their hearts and libraries though they could no longer do so in the forum, the *De virtute* may have offered Cicero exactly the justification he needed to return to a more active, or a more productively contemplative, role in Roman affairs.³² Moreover, the *De virtute* would receive wider circulation than a truly private letter, which would recommend a gracious response. Certainly, for Cicero to be known as one of that work's first readers, whether or not he was its formal dedicatee, would convey a handsome compliment. In the case of the letter, Cicero may have been reluctant to accept a consolation for a personal loss that he may have seen as more likely to benefit the personal standing of Brutus, the comforter and dispenser of sage rhetoric.

Brutus's letter of consolation on the death of Tullia is not extant. However, we do have Cicero's consolation to Brutus (*Ad Brut.* 17 [18]), written after the suicide of his wife, Porcia, in the first half of 43. Just as we have read Servius's letter on Tullia's death (*Fam.* 4.5 [248]) as a reply to Cicero's earlier, political consolation (*Fam.* 4.3 [202]), we can read the consolation from Cicero to Brutus in dialogue with Brutus's earlier, nonextant letter consoling Cicero for the loss of Tullia. Cicero invites this approach by beginning the letter with a reminder to Brutus of the earlier occasion: "I would perform that duty which you performed in my grief, and I would console you by letter, if I did not know that you are in no need of these remedies by which you relieved my distress. And further, I wish you may bring healing to yourself now more readily than you did to me then." (*Fungerer eo officio quo tu functus es in meo luctu teque per litteras consolarer, nisi scirem iis remediis quibus meum dolorem tum levasses te in tuo non egere; ac velim facilius quam mihi nunc tibi tute medeare, Ad Brut.* 17.1 [18].)

It is, of course, possible that Cicero's reference to Brutus's previous letter of consolation is simply complimentary. However, Cicero's repeated complaints to Atticus about the severity and the inefficacy of that letter suggest that this opening does not express simple sincerity. Rather, the letter opens with a show of courtesy, but Cicero seizes the opportunity to resume the role of the more seasoned, more temperate friend. Now that his former consoler is faced with a comparable loss, Cicero can challenge Brutus to meet his own strict standards.³³

His position at the head of the republican army prevents Brutus from

competing with Cicero in demonstrating the magnitude of his grief, but it presents an excellent opportunity for demonstrating his exceptional self-control. In his bereavement, Brutus is inescapably on display. Cicero stresses this visibility:³⁴

Ac mihi tum, Brute, officio solum erat et naturae, tibi nunc populo et scaenae, ut dicitur, serviendum est; nam cum in te non solum exercitus tui sed omnium civium ac paene gentium coniecti oculi sint, minime decet propter quem fortiores ceteri sumus eum ipsum animo debilitatum videri. (*Ad Brut.* 17.2 [18])

And then, in my case, Brutus, only duty and nature demanded restraint, but now you must serve the people and the stage, as they say. For when the eyes not only of your army but of all the citizens and nearly all peoples are on you, it scarcely befits the very one by whose efforts the rest of us are stronger to be weakened in spirit.

After summing up Brutus's required course of moderation, "what is useful for others is necessary for you" (*ceteris utilis est, tibi necesse est, Ad Brut.* 17.2), Cicero turns away from consolation altogether. He knows, he explains, that even the little he has already written is excessive for Brutus.³⁵ He concludes with a promise of more correspondence soon, giving news of Rome, where they await the arrival of Brutus and his army (17.3).

By holding Brutus to a standard of conduct based on his public military role, his reputation, and his earlier, allegedly effective treatment of Cicero's grief, which he had dispelled through reasoning and force of character (*rationes* and *auctoritas*), Cicero virtually denies Brutus the license to mourn his wife at all, let alone freely. The imputation that Brutus must utterly disguise or banish his grief because of his public position may seem unnecessarily harsh to us. But within the ethos of the republican aristocracy, Cicero's admonitions can be understood, despite their pungency, as a possible source of reassurance for their addressee. To be taken to task by a man whom you yourself previously have rebuked, and thus, he says, cured, invites you to prove yourself a worthy contender in the game of demonstrating virtue in which all men of your standing are engaged. The Roman virtue of impassivity required opportunities for its display: injuries, misfortunes, defeat. A death in the family provided an opportunity that a man like Brutus, a living *exemplum virtutis*, had to accept. In his position as *imperator*, Brutus was ideally positioned to display his virtuous endurance of Porcia's death. Nor was Cicero, his faithful friend and correspondent, slow to exploit the opportunity for reaping reflected glory by recalling



Brutus to his duty, whether his letter was needed or not, whether it was effective or not.³⁶

Parity in Consolation (*Fam.* 5.13, 5.14, 5.15 [201, 251, 252])

Cicero's responses to Luceius's consolatory letters are markedly different from those to Sulpicius and Brutus. Pugnacious to the end in his responses to rivals in politics, oratory, and patriotism (and, in Brutus's case perhaps we should add philosophy and the affections of Atticus), Cicero ends both letters to Luceius with quiet acknowledgments of parity, although they start, like the others, with striving. Lucius Luceius served as praetor in 67 and ran unsuccessfully for the consulship of 60. Closely aligned with Pompey until Pharsalus, he was pardoned by Caesar. He wrote a history of the Social Wars, but Cicero's request that he also write a history of Cicero's suppression of the Catilinarian conspiracy apparently went unfulfilled.³⁷ His letter to Cicero about their political disappointments has not survived but is known from Cicero's response to it (*Fam.* 5.13 [201]). In this letter, Cicero emphasizes Luceius's exemplary strength of mind and declares that he will imitate it. Yet after complimenting Luceius, Cicero suggests that he may even surpass him.

Ad consolandum autem cum illa valent quae eleganter copioseque conlegistum nihil plus quam quod firmitudinem gravitatemque animi tui perspexi; quam non imitari turpissimum existimo. Atque hoc etiam fortiozem me puto quam te ipsum, praeceptorem fortitudinis, quod tu mihi videris spem non nullam habere haec aliquando futura meliora. (*Fam.* 5.13.3 [201])

Although those thoughts that you have gathered eloquently and abundantly have strength to console me, nevertheless nothing has more effect than that firmness and steadiness of your mind, which I have observed; a steadiness I judge not the basest thing to imitate! And yet, I think in this respect that I may be even braver than you, the very teacher of bravery, because you seem to me to have some hope that these matters will be better someday.

Because his outlook is more pessimistic, Cicero suggests, he may demonstrate greater fortitude. A few sentences further on, he repeats his desire to emulate and surpass Luceius: "Therefore I shall bear domestic disasters as you recommend and public ones a little more bravely, perhaps, than you yourself instruct." (*Ergo et domestica feremus ut censes et publica paulo etiam fortius*

fortasse quam tu ipse qui praecipis, *Fam.* 5.13.4 [201].) Cicero explains that he can find some solace in his conscience and his achievements, the recollection of which Lucceius has urged. He takes comfort in the knowledge that he has served his country “beyond what has been required of the heart and mind of any other man” (plus profecto quam est ab animo cuiusquam aut consilio hominis postulatum, 5.13.4). Cicero offers the same remedy, recalling distinguished past service to Rome with a clear conscience, elsewhere in the political consolations (see, e.g., *Fam.* 6.21 [246]). When this advice is couched in exceedingly complimentary terms, as Lucceius’s suggestion to Cicero must have been, the moral force of exhortation is augmented by the complimentary recognition of an addressee’s admirable principles and achievements and his continued high social standing.

Lucceius also wrote a consolatory letter following Tullia’s death. It is dated to May of 45, and Cicero probably received it at his villa at Astura, where he had retired in early March, putting off business in Rome on the excuse of poor health.³⁸ At the letter’s opening, Lucceius expresses surprise that Cicero has not visited Rome for so long a time. He hastens to excuse Cicero’s absence, however, should it be due to some literary occupation. Solitude spent in writing, he writes, is always admirable and especially to be commended in misfortune. But in case Cicero has continued to seclude himself in order to indulge his grief, Lucceius takes him to task:

Sin autem, [sic] ut hinc discesseras, lacrimis ac tristitiae te tradidisti, doleo quia doles et angere, non possum te non, si concedis quod sentimus ut liberius dicamus, accusare. Quid enim? tu solus aperta non videbis, qui propter acumen occultissima perspicias? tu non intelleges te querelis cottidianis nihil proficere? non intelleges duplicari sollicitudines quas elevare tua te prudentia postulat? (*Fam.* 5.14.2 [251])

However if, as before you departed the city, you have abandoned yourself to tears and sadness, although I grieve because you grieve and are tormented, I am not able—if you allow me to speak quite freely what I feel—not to accuse you. For consider: Will you alone not see clearly, who see through hidden matters by your acuity? Do you not understand that you accomplish nothing by daily lamenting? Don’t you understand that you double the anxieties that your wisdom demands you to lessen?

Although Lucceius inserts flattery into this series of rhetorical questions, their tone is more scolding than soothing. In sum, his questions match a conventional rhetorical question that Cicero poses in the *Tusculan Disputations*—namely,



what is more efficacious for setting aside grief than realizing that it accomplishes nothing?³⁹ But in the final paragraph of the letter, Lucceius abandons reasoned argument, and instead makes a personal request: “Yet if I am unable to accomplish anything by persuasion, I strive [to do so] through good will, and by asking that if you support my cause at all, you will set yourself free from those troubles of yours and return to our company. <May you return> either to our shared way of life or to that which is yours alone.” (Quod si non possumus aliquid proficere suadendo, gratia contendimus et rogando, si quid nostra causa vis, ut istis te molestiis laxes et ad convictum nostrum redeas, <redeas> ad consuetudinem vel nostram communem vel tuam solius ac propriam, *Fam.* 5.14.3 [251].)

Cicero’s reply (*Fam.* 5.15 [252]) suggests that its author was motivated more by Lucceius’s request based on *gratia* than by his arguments, whether affectionate or scolding.⁴⁰ He begins by declaring that Lucceius’s love for him is evident from every part of his letter (“Omnis amor tuus ex omnibus partibus se ostendit in iis litteris”), but he quickly turns to a justification of his prolonged sorrow and his absence from Rome. In contrast to the more contentious letter responding to Lucceius’s consolation for political ills (5.13 [201]), in *Fam.* 5.15 Cicero does not pledge to emulate Lucceius. Instead, he stresses their common lot and suggests that since he and Lucceius labor under similar insuperable burdens, they should take refuge in each other’s company (5.15.5 [252]).

The accommodation that Cicero reaches in this exchange, which ends with his representation of both men as on an equal footing, similarly afflicted and similarly in need of restful friendship and retreat, is unparalleled in his other consolatory exchanges. There is no obvious answer to the question of why Cicero’s replies to Lucceius’s consolations end so much more peaceably than those to Brutus and Servius. Cicero’s relationship with Lucceius simply may have contained few sources of friction, whereas his long rivalry with Servius in the courts, and his ever-rocky relations with Brutus, well-attested in the letters to Atticus, may have engendered a prickliness in all their communications. We might also wonder whether the kinds of intellectual discourse, aside from familiar letters, that each correspondent shared with Cicero may have contributed to a less marked eristic strain in the correspondence with Lucceius. All three correspondents were men of letters. Servius was expert in jurisprudence, and Brutus in philosophy, while Lucceius wrote history. Perhaps Cicero was less inclined to wrangle with the historian than the jurisconsult or the Academic. Whether or not history writing was less likely to breed contention among its practitioners than the other fields, it was certainly the realm in which Cicero had the least interest or claim to expertise.

Euphemizing Mediated Consolation

When Marilyn Strathern discusses the distinction between mediated and direct exchange, a distinction that I introduce in chapter 1, she observes that “in a gift economy, social relations are made the overt objects of people’s activities.”⁴¹ Not surprisingly then, when the activity is epistolary consolation, establishing and reaffirming the relationship between correspondents consistently trumps attention to the deceased. Although there are necessarily three parties involved in these letters, the writer, the recipient, and the person who is mourned, the rhetoric of consolatory letters consistently minimizes the role of the deceased. He, she, or they are rarely even mentioned.⁴² Brutus’s wife, Porcia, whose death occasioned Cicero’s letter, is almost entirely omitted from it, making Cicero’s consolation to Brutus all but indistinguishable from a consolation for political misfortune. Porcia and her contribution to Brutus’s well-being are lumped together into a neuter pronoun (*id*) whose value is conceded parenthetically:

minime decet propter quem fortiores ceteri sumus eum ipsum animo debilitatem videri. Quam ob rem accepisti tu quidem dolorem (id enim amisisti cui simile in terris nihil fuit), et est dolendum . . . sed ut modice, ceteris utile est, tibi necesse est. (*Ad Brut.* 17.2 [18])

It least of all suits a man who makes us others braver to seem himself weakened in his spirit. You have indeed received a painful blow (for what you have lost was similar to nothing on earth) and it should be grieved . . . but the moderation that is useful for others is required of you.

Ancient accounts give Brutus’s political and military defeats as the reason for Porcia’s suicide and credit her with extraordinary courage. She died amid dire political circumstances, and especially if these circumstances were known to have caused her decision to kill herself, Cicero’s unusual approach to consoling Brutus is perhaps more suitable than it initially appears. Certainly, the notion that we ought to welcome death when it releases the sufferer from so dismal a political situation, which Servius offered to Cicero, and Cicero to Titius, should have applied to Brutus if to anyone. But Cicero does not use that trope. Instead, he reminds Brutus that his actions are watched by his army and by the world, much as he had urged Servius toward equanimity by reminding him that Caesar and all citizens were judging him.

Tullia plays an only slightly larger role in Servius’s consolation to Cicero.



Servius proposes her imagined reaction to her father's grief as an incentive for self-control, but her name occurs only in the letter's first line, announcing its topic ("de obitu Tulliae, filiae tuae"). In contrast, Servius and Cicero's own names appear prominently within the body of the letter. The actors whose relationship is confirmed by their shared grief and their reciprocated incitements to virtue are the participants who really matter in this exchange. When Servius assures Cicero that his daughter would not be gratified by his excessive grief for her (*Fam.* 4.5.6 [248]), he draws momentary attention to the deceased, but the letter's focus remains firmly on the living.

The absence of the deceased from Ciceronian consolation initially may seem odd, but that oddity is resolved by the realization that epistolary consolation, among the other practices that made up Roman friendship, was a species of gift exchange, and was governed by its prerogatives. The rhetoric of consolatory letters was determined by their social function: the promotion and continuation of *amicitia*. This priority could blur the boundaries between kinds of letters, as happens in the case of the letter that Cicero wrote to Curio *filius* on the death of his father (*Fam.* 2.2 [46]). The occasion seems to call for a consolation, but Cicero does not offer his addressee a single consolatory trope. The solace he does offer is indirect; he promises Curio a special, virtually familial devotion: "You will be as dear to me as you were to your father."⁴³ A short letter from Cicero to Atticus, written to commiserate on the death of a slave, reinforces the fact that a death offered an occasion for exercising an office of friendship. The letter opens: "I was very sorry to hear about Athamas. Your distress shows how kind you are, but you really must temper it. There are many paths to consolation, but this is the most direct: let reason do now what time would eventually accomplish." (Male mehercule de Athamante. Tuus autem dolor humanus is quidem, sed magno opere moderandus. Consolationum autem multae viae sed illa rectissima: impetret ratio quod dies impetratura est, *Att.* 12.10 [247].)

Cicero does not trouble to elaborate on the consolatory trope, and his mention of Atticus's grief is folded into a compliment to Atticus's liberal character. Atticus's *humanitas* marks him out as a truly free man, and thus someone able to master his emotions, as well as his slaves.⁴⁴ The remainder of the letter, only four lines more, concerns measures to be taken to safeguard the health of another slave, Atticus's personal secretary, Alexis. Cicero refers to Alexis here as "imago Tironis," the mirror image of Tiro, his own secretary, whom, coincidentally, he has sent to Rome to recuperate from an illness of his own. This letter demonstrates neatly how a letter, bearing a compliment and an offer of assistance, mediates between two friends. It also shows how the slaves it concerns mediate between their masters—providing through their needs, misfortunes, and accommodations opportunities for the expression of friendship.⁴⁵

Moreover, the phrase “*imago Tironis*” to designate Alexis subtly suggests a parallel resemblance between masters. Atticus, in this scheme, is figured as another Cicero, neatly fulfilling the identification of an ideal friend as another self.

This note and other letters to Atticus that remark on the death or illness of his dependents indicate that providing and receiving epistolary consolation could bind the living more closely together, even, or especially, when the deceased were of humble standing. Sending sympathetic wishes concerning the death or illness of Atticus’s dependents offered Cicero an opportunity to indicate the intimacy of his connection with his friend’s household. These repeated sentiments have the effect of naturalizing Cicero’s sympathy to such a degree that they blur what is an extra-familial exchange—the correspondence between Cicero and Atticus, the heads of two separate households—giving the letters that contain them, usually at the beginning or close, a sort of protective covering or camouflage, so that they could almost pass as expressions of a direct, intra-familial connection. This level of familiarity renders the gift aspect of these letters covert. To borrow Strathern’s phrase, Cicero represents himself feeling “for a kinsman as a kinsman should.”⁴⁶ Although his letters to Atticus are still social instruments, garnering and grooming *amicitia*, even when their messages of esteem, affection, and empathy are entirely sincere, they are very unlikely to arouse the indignation that an insufficiently misrecognized gift, one whose self-interested aspect is too evident, may provoke.

Yet a major drawback to representing consolatory correspondences as two-way, unmediated, and virtually intra-familial, as Cicero does in his condolences to Curio for his father and Atticus for Athamas, is the less abundant increase that direct reciprocity yields in comparison with mediated exchange. When the rhetoric of a consolatory letter occludes the participation of a third party, the good will that this rhetorical stratagem is meant to promote comes at the cost of potentially diminished returns. For comparison, we will turn in the next chapter to a familiar letter that takes as its illocutionary task the consolation of both writer and reader.

3



ABSENCE AND INCREASE

To push our appreciation of the terminological range and subtlety of Cicero's epistolary rhetoric of friendship still further, we may start by comparing some lines from Catullus's poem 50 with a climactic passage from Cicero's *Laelius de amicitia*. A day spent drinking wine and engaging in witty conversation with his friend Gaius Licinius Calvus leaves Catullus inflamed. He manages to get through the night by composing a poem addressed to his now absent friend, perhaps poem 50 itself.¹ Catullus describes his anguish in undeniably erotic terms.

incensus, Licini, facetisque,
ut nec me miserum cibus iuaret
nec somnus tegetet quiete ocellos
sed toto indomitus furore lecto
versarer, cupiens videre lucem,
ut tecum loquerer simulque ut essem. (Catull. 50.8–13)

On fire with your witticisms, Licinius, food was no pleasure for miserable me,
nor could sleep cover my eyes with quiet. Wild, I tossed and turned on my bed,
longing for dawn, so I could talk with you and be with you.

The importance of homosocial relationships and homoerotic language in Catullus's poetry has been widely recognized for some time now.² On the other hand, Cicero, whose public and literary career significantly overlapped with

that of Catullus, though he was a generation older, is rarely credited with (or accused of) a similar sensibility.³ However, when the following passage from Cicero's *Laelius de amicitia* is juxtaposed to Catullus 50, the two display a surprisingly kindred tone.

Virtus, virtus inquam, Gai Fanni et tu Quinte Muci, et conciliat amicitias et conservat. In ea est enim convenientia rerum, in ea stabilitas, in ea constantia. Quae cum se extulit et ostendit suum lumen, et idem aspexit agnovitque in alio, ad id se admovet vicissimque accipit illud quod in altero est; ex quo exardescit sive amor sive amicitia (utrumque enim ductum est ab amando); amare autem nihil est aliud nisi eum ipsum diligere quem ames nulla indigentia, nulla utilitate quaesita, quae tamen ipsa efflorescit ex amicitia etiamsi tu eam minus secutus sis. (*Amic.* 100)

It is virtue, I say, virtue, Gaius Fannius and you, Quintus Mucius, which both brings friendships together and preserves them. In it is found all harmony, stability, and steadfastness. Whenever it rises up and shows forth its light, and sees and recognizes the same thing in another, it moves out toward it and in turn receives what the other has to give. Thence love, or friendship (for both have their origin in loving), blazes forth; and loving is nothing other than showing affection for the object of love for his own sake, not because of any lack in oneself, or the prospect of any advantage; though advantage does indeed flower from friendship even if you were not particularly pursuing it.⁴

Laelius's heightened emotion is indicated by repetition ("virtus, virtus") and by the dramatic address of his interlocutors. *Virtus*, moreover, is animated and mobile. It lifts itself up ("se extulit") and shines ("ostendit") its light. It sees and recognizes ("aspexit agnovitque") virtue in another, and that act of recognition sets aflame ("exardescit") either love or friendship—Laelius treats the two as synonyms here. The active, fiery language that this passage uses to personify virtue is not far removed from how a poet might describe a restless lover, whose sight of the beloved sets him burning. The other attributes of *virtus*, however—its penchant for reconciliation ("conciliat") and preservation ("conservat") and its possession of harmony ("convenientia rerum"), stability ("stabilitas"), and steadfastness ("constantia")—work to counterbalance the erotic possibilities of this passage. *Virtus* does not overthrow cities or men; it knits them together in enduring collaboration.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of friendships: those based in utility, those based in pleasure, and those based in virtue. The *De amicitia* is influenced by a Peripatetic view of friendship, but Cicero avoids Aristotelian schematization and denies that connections based on shared utility



or pleasure are truly friendship.⁵ Cicero makes Laelius propose instead that mutual advantage arises naturally when virtue is the cause and sustaining force of friendship. Pleasure, too, will arise for both partners. Where Aristotle makes divisions, Cicero prefers to synthesize and euphemize. Midway through his culminating speech, Laelius remarks that finding and making friendships is a lifelong business: “since human affairs are fragile and transitory, we must always be looking for people to whom we can give and from whom we can receive affection. For without affection and good will, every pleasant quality is removed from human life.” (quoniam res humanae fragiles caducaeque sunt, semper aliqui anquirendi sunt quos diligamus et a quibus diligamur. Caritate enim benevolentiaque sublata omnis est e vita sublata iucunditas, *Amic.* 102.) This language is idealizing and traditional rather than erotic, but it is significant that Laelius grants a prominent place to the pleasantness (*iucunditas*) generated by friendships as a component of a contented life.

In his letters no less than in the *De amicitia*, Cicero mingles vocabulary resonant of moral seriousness and tradition with language that is charming, urbane, and even flirtatious. A letter written to his friend Trebonius begins with a sparkling alliterative rill (“Et epistulam tuam legi libenter et librum libentissime,” *Fam.* 15.21.1 [207]), and makes professions reminiscent of Catullus on the anguish of separation and its remedy. A letter to Lentulus on a politically and personally sensitive topic glides from pleasure to *pietas* within half a sentence (“Periucundae mihi fuerunt litterae tuae, quibus intellexi te perspicere meam in te pietatem,” 1.9.1 [20]). This chapter compares letters to these two very different correspondents, to each of whom Cicero fashions a distinctively tailored address. The letters resemble one another, however, in that the absence of one correspondent from the other is made much more than a mere fact of the epistolary situation. To both correspondents, Cicero uses absence and the shared distress occasioned by it as a thematic device that structures the letter. Moreover, in both cases the correspondence alone is represented as insufficient to close the gap caused by the separation of one friend from another. So the exchange of letters is supplemented by an exchange of objects, specifically texts. The rhetoric of the letters treats these additional objects of exchange as the natural byproducts of friendship. We may also view them as an increase of the gift.

Desiring Friendship (*Fam.* 15.21, 15.20 [207, 208])

With Gaius Trebonius, Cicero cultivates a nouveau sort of friendship, making use of the same rhetorical register as Catullus does in his poem-letters to fellow litterateurs. Cicero writes to Trebonius a letter that consoles both its author

and its addressee for their absence from one another. Compared with letters occasioned by a misfortune such as a bereavement, letters that console writer and addressee for their mutual separation tend to have a high concentration of language that draws attention to the epistolary status of the text, such as comparing the letter to face-to-face conversation. These letters offer consolation for the absence of each correspondent from the other, a lack that is equally a precondition and an effect of letter writing. They both supply consolation and create the need for further consolation; in these letters desire and its satisfaction are textual, and they constitute a cultural practice in which words reach near parity with deeds. This type of consolatory correspondence played an important role among the social practices of friendship, and like other familiar correspondence, it succeeded through proliferation. These letters inspire the composition and sending of return letters and additional, extra-epistolary texts; they may promote the circulation of those texts beyond the initial addressee, and they fan the flames of the desire that each letter provokes, expresses, and ostensibly consoles.⁶

When Trebonius was sent to Spain late in 46 to assist in Caesar's offensive against the Pompeian forces there, Cicero began a letter to him this way:

Et epistulam tuam legi libenter et librum libentissime; sed tamen in ea voluptate hunc accepi dolorem, quod, cum incendisses cupiditatem meam consuetudinis augendae nostrae (nam ad amorem quidem nihil poterat accedere), tum discedis a nobis meque tanto desiderio adfiscis ut unam mihi consolationem relinquas, fore ut utriusque nostrum absentis desiderium crebris et longis epistulis leniatur. (*Fam.* 15.21.1 [207])

I read your letter gladly and your book very gladly; and yet in that pleasure I received some pain, too, for when you had kindled my desire for increasing our time together (nothing could have added to our affection, to be sure!), then you depart from me, and you place in me so great a longing that you leave behind only one consolation: that the longing each of us feels for the absent other may be softened by long and frequent letters.

Deprived of the company of a friend with whom he has engaged in a stimulating exchange of words, Cicero burns to resume their conversation. Trebonius's departure has abruptly broken off an exchange of ideas, favors, and compliments that has been heating up, and Cicero is crushed. He both prescribes and undertakes a remedy reminiscent of Catullus 50. The only alleviation for his desire as well as for that of Trebonius ("utriusque nostrum absentis desiderium"), he declares, will be a steady and frequent exchange of letters. Since this declaration comes in the letter's first paragraph, the rest of the letter can



be taken as the first installment in the palliative regimen that Cicero has prescribed. *Fam.* 5.21 thus exemplifies a basic epistolary situation and undertakes a remedy that captures two basic motives for epistolary discourse: to render the absent partner present, and to ensure continued contact despite his or her continued absence. Through letters, each friend experiences in sequence the abolition of distance and the illusion of the other's company. From Cicero's letter to Trebonius, we can see that the expression of oscillating, reciprocal longing and relief is not confined to "love letters" in any strict sense, nor to neoteric epistles in verse, but can be observed in actual letters between Roman male friends.

After the fervent expression of the correspondent's dilemma with which *Fam.* 15.21 opens, fully the first half of the letter is occupied with a review of past relations between Cicero and Trebonius. The first act of political support for which Cicero thanks Trebonius took place as much as fourteen years previously, yet it still merits remembrance and thanks, as does Trebonius's concern for Cicero's welfare all the way up to the present.⁷ Cicero's culminating cause for delight, however, is the book that Trebonius has produced and has sent to him. Lewis Hyde writes of gift exchange, "It is as if you give a part of your substance to your gift partner and then wait in silence until he gives you part of his. You put your self in his hands."⁸ In the case of Cicero and Trebonius, this intimate image seems both fitting and also, from our perspective, slightly comic, since it appears that the book that earned Cicero's admiration and gratitude was a collection of his own clever sayings, edited by Trebonius:

ut haec igitur omittam, quae mihi tanti aestimanda sunt quanti vitam aestimo et salutem meam, liber iste quem mihi misisti quantam habet declarationem amoris tui! primum quod tibi facetum videtur quicquid ego dixi, quod alii fortasse non item; deinde quod illa, sive faceta sunt sive sic, fiunt narrante te venustissima; quin etiam ante quam ad me veniatur risus omnis paene consumitur. Quod si in iis scribendis nihil aliud nisi, quod necesse fuit, de uno me tam diu cogitavisses, ferreus essem si te non amarem; cum vero ea quae scriptura persecutus es sine summo amore cogitare non potueris, non possum existimare plus quemquam a se ipso quam me a te amari. Cui quidem ego amori utinam ceteris rebus possem, amore certe respondebo, quo tamen ipso tibi confido futurum satis.

Nunc ad epistulam venio . . . (*Fam.* 15.21.2–3 [207])

Should I overlook these previous services, which I ought to reckon as highly as my life and safety, this book that you have sent me holds such a great declaration of your love! First because you seem to find whatever I say witty, which perhaps not everyone would, next because, with you recounting them, whether brilliant or just so-so, they become extremely charming—indeed, the laugh is nearly over before it comes to me. Even if for no reason other than the fact

that in writing them, you necessarily thought for a long while only about me, I would have to be made of iron not to love you; since truly you could not have thought to set down these stories in writing without the greatest affection, I cannot think that anyone is more loved by himself than I am by you. Would that I were capable of repaying your love by other means, but I will respond with sure affection; I trust that for you this will be enough.

Now I come to your letter . . .

Mention of this book provides a bridge from Cicero's rehearsal of Trebonius's past favors to the present, and to the topic of Trebonius's last letter. It appears that Trebonius, perhaps in his researches for his volume of Ciceronian *dicta*, had read a letter from Cicero to G. Licinius Calvus in which Cicero praised his addressee's style.⁹ Since Cicero was elsewhere critical of Calvus, Trebonius apparently has questioned Cicero about his inconsistency. I have partially quoted Cicero's reply to this charge already, in the Introduction. Now, however, we are in a better position to understand its full significance:

Nunc ad epistulam venio; cui copiose et suaviter scriptae nihil est quod multa respondeam. Primum enim ego illas Calvo litteras nisi non plus quam has quas nunc legis existimans exituras; aliter enim scribimus quod eos solos quibus mitimus, aliter quod multos lecturos putamus. (*Fam.* 15.21.4 [207])

Now I come to your articulate and sweetly written letter, to which I need not respond at length. For one thing, I sent that letter to Calvus no more thinking it would be made public than this one which you are reading now; for we write those letters that we send to their addressees alone one way, and those we think will be read by many, we write differently.

Cicero goes on to defend his praise of Calvus diplomatically: "I praised for the sake of encouraging [him . . . and] because I thought his talent was really worthwhile" (*hortandi causa laudavi . . . quod de ingenio eius valde existimavi bene*, 15.21.4). We may wonder why Cicero does not address the question that was apparently at the heart of Trebonius's letter to him until he has spent a page gratefully recounting Trebonius's past services and affirming their friendship. Influenced by the role of desired and inspiring friend that Calvus plays for Catullus, we might speculate that Trebonius has perceived Cicero's praise of Calvus as a threat, and Calvus as a rival for Cicero's admiration and affection.¹⁰ Trebonius may have wished for Cicero to go on record with a less favorable opinion of Calvus. In that case, Cicero's circumspect reply is even more impressive. Given the likelihood that ostensibly private letters could be more or less intentionally leaked, we should consider it at least possible that the irony



in Cicero's phrasing ("ego illas Calvo litteras misi non plus quam has quas nunc legis existimans exituras") was deliberate.

The appearance of Calvus in this letter as a source of conflict, however polite, introduces into the letter a third person who has at least as substantial a presence as the deceased have in letters of consolation. In recommendation correspondence, the occurrence of a third person as a source of disagreement recurs. Here it is noteworthy that Calvus's disruptive presence in *Fam.* 15.21 is balanced by a third "person" who is a source of shared pleasure rather than conflict: that is, Trebonius's "Cicero," a joint creation of the two correspondents. Since Cicero never refers to Trebonius's book by title, it must remain speculation that "Cicero" was indeed the collection's name. Referring to the book this way, and thus casually personifying it, seems exceedingly likely. In chapter 1 I noted the ease with which book titles could be referred to as if they were people, as when Cicero writes to Trebonius, "I commend to you my 'Orator'" ("Oratorem" meum . . . commendavi, *Fam.* 15.20 [208]). Here, joking personification is enriched by the verb Cicero employs; ordinarily, protégés would arrive at an officer's camp with a letter of recommendation in which the letter-writer would entrust (*commendare*) the protégé, who was also the letter's bearer, to its addressee. Cicero's *Orator* requires an actual person, however, to complete its delivery, and so Cicero has entrusted it not to Trebonius directly, but to a man named Sabinus. The letter's opening sentence reads in full: "Oratorem' meum (sic enim inscripsi) Sabino tuo commendavi." This messenger's felicitous cognomen supplies Cicero with a further opportunity for humor.¹¹ He elaborates the joke at some length before turning to the real subject of the letter—that is, the affection between Trebonius and himself—and its documenting, development, and continuation by means of correspondence. "But enough about Sabinus" (*Sed de Sabino satis*), the first section ends. Implicitly, it goes on: "Let's talk about you and me."

Tu, mi Treboni, quoniam ad amorem meum aliquantum olei discedens addidisti, quo tolerabilius feramus igniculum desiderii tui crebris nos litteris appellato, atque ita si idem fiet a nobis. Quamquam duae causae sunt cur tu frequentior in isto officio esse debeas quam nos: primum quod olim solebant qui Romae erant ad provincialis amicos de re publica scribere, nunc tu nobis scribas oportet (res enim publica istic est); deinde quod nos aliis officiis tibi absenti satis facere possumus, tu nobis nisi litteris non video qua re alia satis facere possis. (*Fam.* 15.20.2 [208])

When you departed, dear Trebonius, you added some fuel to my love. So as to make the little fire of missing you easier to bear, address me with frequent letters, and as much as you require it, I will do likewise. There are two reasons why

you ought to be more constant in this service than I. First, because once upon a time it was customary for those in Rome to write to their friends in the provinces about public affairs, but now it is fitting for you to write to us about that, for the *res publica* is over there! Second, because there are other services I can do for you while you are away, but I do not see any way you can satisfy me except by writing letters.

“Mi Treboni” is a familiar, affectionate form of address. Love is implicitly fiery here, because oil (*oleum*) fuels it, but the diminutive *igniculum* is playful. Cicero’s affection for Trebonius is cozy, rather than a destructive flame. Cicero’s wit makes permissible his apparent violation of the rules of misrecognition when he teases Trebonius about his disadvantage in maintaining an even exchange of friendly services with Cicero while away in Spain.¹² Humor euphemizes the requirements of *amicitia* here, just as, in the preceding sentence, deftly wielded irony draws the sting from Cicero’s observation that the *res publica*, such as it is, now moves around the empire with the dictator Caesar, rather than being firmly centered in the Roman forum.

Cicero and Trebonius’s friendship has already produced increase literally, in the form of Trebonius’s book dedicated to Cicero, which may circulate freely beyond the two correspondents. As it does so, it will continue to testify to their connection, creating further, intangible increase. More than Cicero’s profession of growing desire for Trebonius’s company, or the proliferation of their private letters, Trebonius’s collection of Ciceronian sayings advertises their friendship and, by its circulation, increases the fame of both partners. As for Cicero’s letter, its status as gift remains implicit, but its artfulness is as strongly evident at its conclusion as at its beginning. The closing sentences of *Fam.* 15.21 are freighted with expressions of esteem and obligation, but they also strongly echo the affection and longing expressed in the letter’s opening lines.

Reliquum est tuam profectionem amore prosequare, reditum spe expectem, absentem memoria colam, omne desiderium litteris mittendis accipiendisque leniam. Tu velim tua in me studia et officia multum tecum recordere. Quae cum tibi liceat, mihi nefas sit oblivisci, non modo virum bonum me existimabis verum etiam te a me amari plurimum iudicabis. Vale. (*Fam.* 15.21.5 [207])

It remains for me to attend to your setting forth with love, to await your return with hope, to care for you, so long as you are absent, with memory, to soothe every longing with sending and receiving letters. I hope that you will be mindful of your great service and affection for me—you are allowed to forget these things, but for me it would be blasphemous to forget. Not only will you judge me a good man, but also you will judge that you are most loved by me.



At the letter's opening, Cicero began with language that emphasized pleasure, desire, and yearning and its appeasement. *Voluptas*, *cupiditas*, *desiderium*, and the verb *lenio* all occur within the first sentence. Then he moves into an assessment of Trebonius's support for him in the past, using more traditional language and stressing his obligation to remember and correctly value Trebonius's assistance ("quae mihi tanti aestimanda sunt quanti vitam aestimo et salutem meam"). In the final sentences of the letter Cicero repeats this movement, beginning with desire and its mitigation through correspondence ("desiderium . . . leniam") and ending with a strongly worded statement of his duty to remember Trebonius's love and good offices; it would be sacrilegious ("nefas") for him to forget. Cicero ends by stressing reciprocity, both in correspondence ("litteris mittendis accipiendisque"), and in friendship, where an even exchange consists of affection on one side—Cicero will love Trebonius—and accurate evaluation on the other—Trebonius will reckon that Cicero is a *vir bonus*, an ideological category that Cicero had spent the last two decades refining. Yet the even reciprocity by which Cicero characterizes this friendship obscures its abundant increase, the collaboratively generated book that Trebonius has bestowed on Cicero, and the copy of his *Orator* that Cicero sends in return. The significance of this kind of increase and the confusion of people and texts that accompanies it will concern us at greater length in chapter 4, when we turn to letters of recommendation.

Conventional Friendship (*Fam.* 1.9 [20])

Now we turn to a letter that was not composed as a consolation, either for absence or for misfortune, but as an apologia. Nonetheless, in its tactical lamenting over absence, and its supplementation of correspondence with other textual gifts, *Fam.* 1.9 [20] offers an apt foil to *Fam.* 15.21 [207]. Cicero wrote this letter to Publius Cornelius Lentulus in December of 54. At the time Lentulus was absent from Rome, acting as governor of Cilicia. In the letters to Trebonius, Cicero appears to be at least slightly the superior partner in the friendship; he is the recipient of a double gift from Trebonius—the physical book of dicta and the compliment of being commemorated by that book. In the exchange with Lentulus, however, Cicero appears as the lesser partner. Cicero owed a great deal to Lentulus, a *nobilis* and a political conservative who, as consul in 57, had managed Cicero's recall from exile.¹³ Fittingly, along with an explanation of his recent support for Caesar, which Lentulus had requested, Cicero sends his friend books rather than receiving them. Lentulus, primed by rumors representing Cicero's actions uncharitably, had written to inquire into Cicero's apparent departure from the agenda of the conservative members of

the senate. The considerable length, careful organization, and contents of Cicero's reply suggest that this letter was intended for circulation well beyond its named addressee.¹⁴ Lentulus's support for Cicero in 57 had made him a guarantor, in a sense, of Cicero's future political actions, and, in particular, of his continued advocacy for conservative forces in the senate. Thus, in a very real sense, Cicero *owed* Lentulus the explanation he puts forward in *Fam.* 1.9, and by acknowledging this social debt at the letter's outset and at several points within the letter, he goes some way toward paying it.

The quasi-public nature of this letter, in contrast to the explicitly private nature of the letter to Trebonius, constitutes a difference that affects the register of each. Cicero probably expected a wider and less closely controlled audience for *Fam.* 1.9, a more narrow audience for *Fam.* 15.21. This difference in intended readership would almost certainly elicit stylistic decisions consonant with the differences in the status and taste of his named addressees, since those addressees would act as a filter: further readers would either get access to the physical text through them or would read the letter with knowledge of the character of the man to whom it was addressed. Thus, for instance, playful touches that a reader with any knowledge of Trebonius would expect to find in his correspondence might be judged bizarre in a letter to Lentulus. Along with his social position vis-à-vis his named addressee and his pragmatic aims for the letter, these expectations for its readership determine Cicero's demure tone and his use of traditional Roman expressions of affiliation, affection, and evaluation. The opening of the letter to Lentulus contrasts markedly with the humorous intimacy of the letter to Trebonius. Cicero expresses great pleasure with and affection for his correspondent, but from the start *Fam.* 1.9 emphasizes traditional moral vocabulary; not *benevolentia*, but an even stronger feeling of *pietas* guides Cicero.¹⁵ Like the letter to Trebonius, *Fam.* 1.9 immediately comments on the constraint that absence places on Cicero's demonstrations of affection. Yet the value of visibly, practically demonstrating his allegiance to Lentulus's cause, rather than a simple desire for his company, seems to motivate Cicero's wish for his addressee's return.

Periucundae mihi fuerunt litterae tuae, quibus intellexi te perspicere meam in te pietatem; quid enim dicam benevolentiam, cum illud ipsum gravissimum et sanctissimum nomen pietatis levius mihi meritis erga me tuis esse videatur? Quod autem tibi grata mea erga te studia scribis esse, facis tu quidem abundantia quadam amoris ut etiam grata sint ea quae praetermitti sine nefario scelere non possunt. Tibi autem multo notior atque inlustrior meus in te animus esset si hoc tempore omni quo diiuncti fuimus et una et Romae fuissemus. (*Fam.* 1.9.1 [20])



Your letter, from which I understood that you see my loyalty (*pietas*) toward you, gave me exceeding pleasure. I say *pietas*, for how can I call it good will (*benevolentia*), when the most serious and sacred term *pietas* seems too light for your services on my part? Moreover, as to the fact that you write that you are grateful to me for my zealous efforts on your behalf, what copious resources of love you draw on, that efforts which would be criminal for me to omit make you grateful! My feelings toward you would be more legible and transparent by far if only we had been together and at Rome for all the time that we have been apart.

Word order in the letter's opening sentences creates a sense of close interconnection between correspondents. "Toward you" (in te) is nestled in the middle of "my . . . loyalty" (meam . . . pietatem). "Your services" (meritis . . . tuis) embraces "toward me" (erga me). The next clause is precisely parallel, with "my efforts" embracing "toward you" (erga te) and *tibi* taking the position that *mihi* occupied above. The artful disposition of possessive adjectives and pronouns reinforces the reassuring illusion of Cicero's presence that this opening strives to create, and augments by contrast the desolation of being away from Rome and apart from one another, with all the possibilities for interference and misunderstanding that separation and distance have introduced.

The section of the letter that concludes Cicero's defense of his recent actions in support of Caesar reiterates the importance of presence, partially by asserting that Cicero's conscience is so clear, and his confidence in Lentulus is so complete, that their absence from one another, while regrettable, has not led Cicero to take any actions he would not otherwise have done. He goes on to express happy anticipation of their reunion. These meditations on absence and presence bring the letter full circle, placing the *apologia* within a thematic framework elaborated from a familiar epistolary theme.

His ego consiliis, si te praesentem habuissem, ut opinio mea fert, essem usus isdem. . . . Sed quocumque tempore mihi potestas praesentis tui fuerit, tu eris omnium moderator consiliorum meorum, tibi erit eidem, cui salus mea fuit, etiam dignitas curae; me quidem certe tuarum actionem sententiarum voluntatum rerum denique omnium socium comitemque habebis, neque mihi in omni vita res tam erit ulla proposita quam ut cottidie vehementius te de me optime meritum esse laetere. (*Fam.* 1.9.22 [20])

If you had been present, I believe that I would have pursued the same policies. . . . But at whatever time I am able to avail myself of your presence, you will be the governor (*moderator*) of all my policies. You will have the same care for my worth (*dignitas*) as [in 57] you had for my citizenship (*salus*); assuredly you will have me as comrade and ally in your actions, your opinions, and, finally,

in all your wishes. Nor in all my life will any matter arise greater than this: that daily you become more heartily glad for the services you have done me.

At this point in the letter, Cicero turns to Lentulus's request for his books. Whereas Cicero thanks Trebonius for the collection of Ciceronian dicta that his friend has compiled, Cicero sends Lentulus an assortment of his own books in fulfillment of Lentulus's request for them. The list of enclosed works is extensive, but the context of this list, rather than its contents, reveals how the literary gifts that accompanied his letter worked as a social stratagem. These works are part of a nexus of mutual interests by which Cicero reminds Lentulus of their many ties even as he strengthens them.

Quod rogas ut mea tibi scripta mittam quae post discessum tuum scripserim, sunt orationes quaedam, quas Menocrito dabo, neque ita multae, ne per timescas. Scripsi etiam (nam me iam ab orationibus diiungo fere referoque ad mansuetiores Musas, quae me maxime sicut iam a prima adulescentia delectarunt)—scripsi igitur Aristotelio more, quem ad modum quidem volui, tris libros in disputatione ac dialogo “de oratore,” quos arbitror Lentulo tuo fore non inutilis; abhorrent enim a communibus praeceptis atque omnem antiquorum, et Aristoteliam et Isocratiam, rationem oratoriam complectuntur. Scripsi etiam versibus tris libros “de temporibus meis”; quos iam pridem ad te misissem si esse edendos putassem (sunt enim testes et erunt sempiterni meritorum erga me tuorum meaeque pietatis), sed quia verebar non eos qui se laesos arbitrantur (etenim id feci parce et molliter) sed eos quos erat infinitum bene de <me> meritos omnis nominare ***. Quos tamen ipsos libros, si quam cui recte committam invenero, curabo ad te perferendos. Atque istam quidem partem vitae consuetudinisque nostrae totam ad te deferō; quantum litteris, quantum studiis, veteribus nostris delectationibus, consequi poterimus, id omne ad arbitrium tuum, qui haec semper amasti, libentissime conferemus. (*Fam.* 1.9.23 [20])

Because you ask that I send you the works that I have written since your departure, there are some speeches, which I will give to Menocritus—don't be afraid, for there aren't many. I have also written (for now I am detaching myself from speeches and reporting to gentler Muses, which greatly delight me as they did in my youth)—accordingly, I have written in the manner of Aristotle, to the extent that I wanted to, anyway, three books of disputation and dialogue “On the Orator,” which I think your son (*Lentulo tuo*) may find of some use; for they shy away from common rules and they embrace the whole account of oratory, both Aristotelian and Isocratean. I have also written three books in verse “On My Vicissitudes,” which I already would have sent you if I had thought they were ready to circulate—for they are and will be eternal witnesses (*testes*)¹⁶ of your services to me and my gratitude, but I have not, not because I am afraid



of those who might judge themselves wounded (in fact, I have criticized sparingly and gently) but because I am afraid that it is a boundless task to name all those who deserve well from me. Nevertheless, those very volumes, if I can find any bearer to whom they can rightly be entrusted, I will take care also to send to you. And yet, indeed, this part of my life and habit I submit to you entire; as much of literary effort and study, our old delights, as I am able to achieve, I very gladly bring it all to your judgment, you who have always loved these things.

Cicero's intellectual and literary work (*litterae, studia*) is made equivalent in this sentence to his political and social policies (*consilia*) mentioned above: in both spheres Cicero defers to Lentulus. Both Cicero's acts and his writings are proper media for the expression and negotiation of his relationship with Lentulus. But their mutual interest in intellectual pursuits and a common political course do not exhaust the realms in which Cicero may declare his bonds to Lentulus; there remain family ties, to which the writer now turns:

Quae ad me de tuis rebus domesticis scribis quaeque mihi commendas, ea tantae mihi curae sunt ut me nolim admoneri, rogari vero sine magno dolore vix possim. Quod de Quinti fratris negotio scribis, te priore aetate, quod morbo impeditus in Ciliciam non transieris, conficere non potuisse, nunc autem omnia facturum ut conficias, id scito esse eius modi ut frater meus vere existimet adiuncto isto fundo patrimonium fore suum per te constitutum. Tu me de tuis rebus omnibus et de Lentuli tui nostrique studiis et exercitationibus velim quam familiarissime certiore et quam saepissime facias existimesque neminem cuiquam neque cariorum neque iucundiorum umquam fuisse quam te mihi, idque me non modo ut tu sentias sed ut omnes gentes, etiam ut posteritas omnis intellegat esse facturum. (*Fam.* 1.9.24 [20])

As for the family affairs about which you write to me, and which you entrust (*commendas*) to me, these are so great a concern for me that I wish not to be reminded; really, I can scarcely be asked without great pain.¹⁷ Concerning what you write about the business of my brother Quintus—namely, that you were unable to carry it out last summer, because sickness prevented you from crossing into Cilicia, but that now you will do all you can to complete it—please be assured that my brother truly will reckon this estate, once it is added to his holdings, to be his inheritance (*patrimonium*) established by you. I hope that you will inform me as intimately and as often as you can about all your affairs and the studies and exercises of your (and my) dear son, and may you account no one dearer and more pleasing to anyone than you are to me, and reckon that I am going to make this known not only so that you and all peoples may perceive it, but that even posterity may understand.¹⁸

Shackleton Bailey comments that the letter could well end here. Certainly, this is its rhetorical climax. But in a penultimate section (25), Cicero goes on to offer a bit of advice about how Lentulus should leave his province, tempered by a reassurance that he knows Lentulus will act for the best. Then a final paragraph is added (26), in effect a postscript that replies to a newly delivered letter from Lentulus. Making this addition was no doubt more practical than writing a new letter, but it also gives Cicero an extra chance to assert his intimacy with Lentulus and to revise his position in the relationship from clearly subordinate to something more nearly equal. In this final paragraph, Cicero is not the indebted letter-writer anxious to justify himself to his great friend Lentulus, a role that he has filled dutifully and at length; now, we see that he also receives letters from his friend Lentulus that contain requests for assistance rather than criticism, to which he diligently replies, offering counsel and support.

In this letter, all the forms of influence and favor that Cicero can muster—shared political interests and ideals, intellectual pursuits, and family ties—are brought to bear to persuade Lentulus of his continuing loyalty and friendship. In contrast to the extraordinary length and level of detail offered by *Fam.* 1.9, the exchange between Trebonius and Cicero seems slight, despite the parallel passage in which Cicero gratefully lists Trebonius's services to him over the years. In fact, two major differences between these letters stand out. One, their disparate style, has already been noted. The other is the absence of family members in the letter to Trebonius versus the mention of Quintus and Lentulus *filius* in *Fam.* 1.9.¹⁹ Cicero's repeated mentions of Lentulus's son, whom he calls "ours" (1.9.24) and "our Lentulus" (1.7.11 [18]) are not coincidental. Rather, by figuring Lentulus *filius* as shared, Cicero represents his mediated exchanges with Lentulus as though they were direct. By virtue of their shared fatherly interest, Cicero is able to present himself behaving toward Lentulus as a kinsman should. Likewise, when Cicero assures Lentulus that Quintus Cicero will consider his inheritance (*patrimonium*) to be firmly established (*constitutum*) by Lentulus's favor, he hints at another figuratively familial relationship.

Nonetheless, the intimacy between Cicero and Trebonius fostered by their joint creation of a book should not be underestimated. In fact, the mediating role played by shared literary pursuits—and their accompanying objects—was comparable to the mediating power of shared concern for the welfare of a son, a legal ward, a slave or freedman, or a freeborn protégé. In the next chapter, we turn to the letters that accompany and facilitate the exchange of persons. As with consolatory correspondence, voluntary friendship is still the avowed motivation for these letters and their chief means of euphemizing their social function, but in commendatory correspondence the conventions that govern letters



of consolation for misfortune—both Hellenistic philosophy and traditional Roman ideals—no longer obscure the fact that the negotiation of status is a central concern. The letters to which we now turn are more straightforwardly instrumental than either consolatory letters, in which the rhetoric of consolation suggested their status as worthy gift objects in and of themselves, and also effectively disguised their self-interested dimension, or the letters to Trebonius and Lentulus, which were supplemented by, or themselves supplemented, the exchange of further textual gifts. In letters of recommendation, which lack the supporting tropes that philosophy provided to consolatory letters, metaphorical kinship and formulaic euphemism are all the more evident. Sometimes, as we shall see, these formulae failed. Sometimes the participants in commendatory correspondence misunderstood or refused to acquiesce to its fictions.

4



RECOMMENDATION

In the classical world as now, letters of recommendation were an essentially practical epistolary form.¹ A more powerful person would write a letter on behalf of a less powerful protégé, a recommendation addressed to a third party who was an existing connection of the writer and a connection hoped for by the protégé. Thus business was transacted and careers were advanced. But the practical function of this kind of letter does not preclude rhetorical artistry, particularly since a recommendation that was unable to persuade its addressee to grant its request would not achieve its aim. Book 13 of Cicero's *Ad familiares* is made up entirely of recommendation letters.² Others are found elsewhere in his correspondence.³ The sheer quantity of these letters testifies to their importance, and their contents, while they can seem monotonous, nonetheless demonstrate that recommendation letters were a major means by which members of the Roman elite protected and extended their reputation and influence.

Just as consolatory letters are identifiable from the tropes they employ and their conventional rhetoric and structure, so too recommendations are easily recognized as such. However, Cicero wrote a number of letters that comment on or accompany his philosophical and rhetorical writings, and these letters, while they are not recommendations of a protégé from one *amicus* to another, are nevertheless similar to Cicero's *litterae commendaticiae*. Both kinds of letters enact and record the exchange of gifts, and do so using strikingly similar language. Moreover, a letter of recommendation objectifies its carrier, the letter-writer's protégé, figuring a person as a gift, while the cover letter for a literary gift often personifies the text it accompanies. Lewis Hyde has called the



tendency to treat objects involved in gift exchange as persons “the liveliness of the gift.” He writes, “A confusion between organic liveliness and cultural or spiritual liveliness is inherent in a discussion of gift exchange. As Mauss first pointed out, in an exchange of gifts, ‘things . . . are to some extent parts of persons, and persons . . . behave in some measure as if they were things.’”⁴ By way of comparison, letters of recommendation could be juxtaposed aptly to letters about the dedication and circulation of literary works. The two types of exchange are structurally homologous. Both the exchange of slaves, freedmen, protégés, and other more or less dependent persons and the exchange of texts relied on similar etiquette and nurtured similar expectations of continued connections among the participants. This chapter examines both formal letters of recommendation and some departures from the typical rhetoric and etiquette of *litterae commendaticiae*.

Basic Elements and Elaborations

The trio of participants involved in epistolary consolation can be usefully compared with a similar triangular structure observable both within epistolary recommendations and external to the texts themselves in the practice of their exchange and influence. In the rivalry between consoler and consoled, the deceased person recedes to the margins of the correspondents’ attention, whereas in recommendation, the protégé who is recommended by a letter-writer to his addressee necessarily not only continues to exist but is, like the letter, literally present first to the letter’s writer and then to its reader. He passes between them as a mediator and also a witness of their alternating performances of good will toward one another. To complicate matters further, once the protégé has been granted a favor, he may move from his mediating position to become a letter-writer or addressee himself, a participant in rather than merely a recipient of *gratia* (or *beneficia*, *officia*, *merita*) in the further circulation of favors. Several specific instances considered below illustrate the proliferation of relationships that results from the circulation of successful letters of recommendation. First, we will look at how the rhetoric of these letters was shaped by their role within epistolary gift exchange.

Reading even a few of the letters in *Ad familiares* 13 makes their formulaic nature clear; the survival of a large number enables us to describe that formula with confidence. Cicero’s letters of recommendation consistently exhibit three elements, although their order is not fixed. One of these is a declaration or description of the relationships that already exist between Cicero and the persons for whom (his protégé) and to whom (his addressee) he is writing the letter. Often this declaration also advertises the rapport that exists

between Cicero and his addressee. The second and third elements of this kind of letter are the request itself and the guarantee of a reward for its fulfillment. Both require some rhetorical dexterity. The request may be specific or general. The third, reassuring element is often more elaborately phrased than the request, and often concludes the letter. Cicero indicates to his addressee the advantages he will reap by granting Cicero's request, and also assures the addressee more or less conditionally of Cicero's, and often also the protégé's, gratitude.⁵ Cicero comments indirectly on the formulaic nature of his *litterae commendaticiae* when he attempts a recommendation of a "new kind" (*novum genus*) for a protégé named Precilius in 45 (*Fam.* 13.15 [317]). Cicero deftly weaves five complete lines plucked from Homer into the letter, topping them off with one from Euripides. This Homeric panoply signals Cicero's political deference toward Caesar, his addressee, but also aims to suggest parity of taste and erudition.⁶ This letter nevertheless conforms to the rhetorical pattern evinced by less ambitious examples of its type. Cicero compliments the character of his protégé Precilius, alludes to his friendship with Precilius's father, and expresses his gratitude for the kindness he is sure Caesar's own generosity would prompt toward the youth, even without Cicero's recommendation.

The expression of gratitude at the letter's conclusion provides an opportunity for the letter's writer to link his sentiments to those of his subject. These thanks are often accompanied by a promise of future benefits that either the letter-writer or its subject will perform for the addressee—a promise that is contingent, of course, on continued *amicitia*. The vague or implicit promise of a future return reveals a contractual aspect to commendatory letters, as well as paving the way for further transactions beyond the one enacted by the letter in hand. The writer promises that the protégé, the subject of and witness to the current letter, as well as the immediate recipient of the requested favor, will become a purveyor of favors and letters himself, to the benefit of the current writer and addressee.

A number of very brief recommendations are simply composed of the three elements I have described. These short letters demonstrate the triangularity of epistolary recommendations with special clarity:⁷

CICERO P. CAESIO S. D.

P. Messienum, equitem Romanum omnibus rebus ornatum meumque perfamiliarem, tibi commendo ea commendatione quae potest esse diligentissima. Peto a te et pro nostra et pro paterna amicitia ut eum in tuam fidem recipias eiusque rem famamque tueare. Virum bonum tuaque amicitia dignum tibi adiunxeris mihi que gratissimum feceris. (*Fam.* 13.51 [61])



CICERO TO P. CAESIUS, GREETINGS.

I recommend to you P. Messienus, a Roman knight accomplished in all things and my particular friend, with as thoroughgoing a recommendation as is possible. I request, on behalf of our own friendship and my friendship with your father, that you receive him into your circle and look after his business and his reputation. You will have joined to yourself a good man worthy of your friendship, and you will have acted very pleasingly toward me.

The first words in this short letter are the name of the man recommended, followed by a series of descriptors that fix his citizenship, his class, his attainments, and his relationship to Cicero, who situates himself first vis-à-vis his protégé Messienus, his “close connection” (*perfamiliares*), then his addressee: “I request,” he writes, “on behalf of our own friendship and my friendship with your father.” Once Cicero has established the grounds of his amity with both Messienus and Caesius, he makes his request, which is at once general and comprehensive. Cicero solicits Caesius’s material concerns (*res*) and his reputation (*fama*). If Cicero’s overture is successful, Messienus and Caesius will become connected to one another, as well as sharing a connection to Cicero, and further transactions will follow. In time, Caesius may reverse the exchange, sending a protégé of his own to Cicero. In addition, once connected to Messienus, Caesius may connect Messienus to others, and eventually Messienus may refer people back to Caesius, as well as to Cicero.

While the letter of introduction that Cicero sends to Caesius is basically dialogic—a message that travels from sender to recipient, inviting reciprocity—this dialogue is not simply between “I” and “you.” The bearer of the written message, Cicero’s protégé, has voice and agency to contribute to the exchange, as a speaker and as a witness. Messienus is likely to have personally delivered this letter of introduction, and he may have supplemented the vague, albeit comprehensive, request that Cicero makes to Caesius on his behalf. The epistolary dialogue is triangulated by the essential participation of the protégé, both within the letter as its subject and externally, because he is a speaking, living form of the gift who becomes a live link in the circulation and increase of the tangible and intangible goods whose exchange is transacted via correspondence. Thus, the successful recommendation does not merely leave Cicero indebted to Caesius. It simultaneously invites Caesius to enter into reciprocal communication with Messienus, and may encourage Messienus to continue communication with Cicero as well. Through this kind of correspondence, a series of relationships may continue to unfold and deepen, including an increasing number of participants in the chain, proliferating in the number and importance of the transactions they conduct.

The conclusions of *litterae commendaticiae* are especially rich in formulae.⁸ Most frequently, these letters conclude with a sentence expressing pleasure or gratitude on Cicero's part, or combining thanks with a promise of reciprocity by Cicero or the protégé. Occasionally, thanks are combined with a repetition of the letter's request. The phrasing is usually some variation on the close of the first letter in the book, to Memmius: "If you do what I ask, I will be very pleased [with you]." (*si feceris, quod rogo, fore mihi gratissimum*, *Fam.* 13.1.6 [63].) Phrases of the type "*gratissimum mihi est*" can be translated equally correctly as expressions of pleasure or gratitude. The synonymy of these two meanings in Latin is especially intriguing, given the importance of reciprocity in gift exchange: I am pleased; therefore I am grateful—and it goes without saying that the grateful man makes a return.⁹ In fact, the limited euphemism that obtains in recommendation letters may sometimes lie simply in leaving unexpressed the promise of making a return.

There are letters, however, in which the closing expression of gratitude is joined to an explicit promise of future recompense. In these letters, the writer may pledge his own or his protégé's services to the addressee. A recommendation Cicero penned on behalf of the Bithynian *publicani* closes with a personal guarantee: "It would be very pleasing to me, should you act as I have requested, and by way of my own experience, I promise and pledge that if you accommodate the Bithynian Company, you will know them to be grateful and mindful." (*Id cum mihi gratissimum feceris tum illud tibi expertus promitto et spondeo, te socios Bithyniae, si iis commodaris, memores esse et gratos cogniturum*, *Fam.* 13.9.3 [139].) Cicero declares his own obligation to his addressee, Servius Sulpicius Rufus, in a letter written on Atticus's behalf: "Although I hesitated to thank you before, now I do so plainly, and I wish you to consider that by whatever services in the Epirotic business and other affairs Atticus is bound to you, in these matters I am bound to you also" (*quod modo verebar tibi gratias agere, nunc plane ago teque ita existimare volo, quibuscumque officiis in Epiroticis reliquisque rebus Atticum obstrinxeris, isdem me tibi obligatum fore*, 13.18.2 [284]). When thanks are joined to a promise of a future return, the vagueness of that promise provides a euphemistic scrim that veils the contractual nature of these exchanges. Both the time at which a return will be made and the substance of the counter-gift remain unspecified.

Other letters do not express thanks explicitly, but pledge Cicero's or his protégé's admiration for the addressee and zealous support for his interests. On the other hand, when thanks are joined to a repetition of the writer's request, the conclusion of the letter lays flattering emphasis on the potential helpfulness of the addressee, and the writer's reliance on his generosity. The effusive thanks and promise of future assistance with which Cicero closes most commendatory



letters restate the mutual esteem that motivated, obliged, or permitted him to write the letter in the first place. The combination of Cicero's gratitude and the gratitude of the letter's subject, whether an individual, a municipality, or a corporation, complicates the simple logic of "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." An adequate account of the dynamics of Roman recommendation letters must accommodate the witness and participation of a third person, whose presence transforms the subtext of these letters into something along the lines of "I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch his, and, in fact, by scratching his back, you're practically scratching mine!"

This message is not always restricted to the subtext, although it is never expressed as crudely as the back-scratching formulation may suggest. In a letter to Quintus Valerius Orca, an officer charged with distributing land to Caesar's veterans, Cicero's conclusion euphemizes away the potential increase of the gift—the double obligation to Valerius that a favor to Curtius will yield, by placing both Cicero and Curtius under obligation to him—by declaring that the interests of his protégé Curtius are identical to his own:

te in maiorem modum rogo ut C. Curti ream meam putes esse; quicquid mea causa faceres, ut, id C. Curti causa cum feceris, existimes quod ille per me habuerit id me habere abs te. Hoc te vehementer etiam atque etiam rogo. (*Fam.* 13.5.3 [319])

I appeal emphatically to you that you consider Curtius's business as if it were my own. Whatever you would do for my sake, reckon that when you have done it for Curtius's sake, what he would have had through me, I have it from you. I make my appeal to you urgently, again and again.

Subtly, word order reinforces the emphasis on Cicero as the connection between the two other participants in this transaction. He is simultaneously the benefactor of Curtius and the recipient of Valerius's favor: "ille per me . . . me . . . abs te."¹⁰ Cicero proposes that when Valerius sees Curtius profiting by the results of his beneficence, he should envision Cicero enjoying the benefit. Moreover, Valerius should consider his own actions toward Curtius synonymous with what Cicero would do for Curtius, were he in a position to act directly. This thought experiment has the effect of eliding Curtius's grateful perspective altogether: Valerius is instructed to act as though his acts benefit Cicero directly, and Cicero, accordingly, will regard Curtius's benefit from Valerius as though it were his own. So far, so good—this is the kind of euphemistic tactic we saw in chapter 1, in which mediated exchange is represented as

though it were direct. But not only does this rhetorical sleight-of-hand diminish Curtius (while his participation in the exchange remains, in fact, essential); it also amplifies Cicero's beneficence at Valerius's expense. For when Valerius bestows a benefit on Curtius, Curtius will experience the gift as though it has come from Cicero ("per me"). According to the logic of the letter, Valerius is supposed to be unperturbed by this elision of his own beneficent behavior, apparently, because he will be amply repaid by Cicero's gratitude. Any satisfaction Valerius may anticipate gaining directly from Curtius, in their future dealings with one another, has thus been entirely obscured by the letter's rhetoric, although Valerius, as an experienced player of this game, would presumably still recognize the opportunity for contracting a double obligation that Cicero discreetly minimizes.

While combining the gratitude of the letter's protégé with that of its author draws those two participants closely together, other conventions of these letters align the author more closely with his addressee. For example, in a number of commendatory letters, Cicero makes his request "so far as your good faith and worth permit" (*quantum tua fides dignitasque patietur*, *Fam.* 13.37 [308]) or "as my worth and yours require" (*sicut tua fides et meus pudor postulat*, 13.58 [140]). These parenthetical appeals reassure Cicero's addressee that he and Cicero are equals. They flatter the addressee and hint that *he* is the real recipient of Cicero's good favor. Hannah Cotton calls these flattering nods to the honor and fair-mindedness of Cicero's addressee "saving clauses."¹¹ Cicero's profession of unwillingness to cause his addressee embarrassment or inconvenience gives both him and the letter's recipient an out, should the favor Cicero requests for his protégé prove impossible or disadvantageous to any of the parties involved. Nevertheless, Cicero demonstrates his eagerness to preserve his own dignity as well as to compliment his addressee by suggesting that the success of his request will prove the addressee's esteem for him to its subject, as in a letter to Lucius Cilleolus: "Luceius himself inferred from your letter to him that nobody has stronger authority or credit with you than I. I ask you to prove that devotion again in this event, and often." (*Luceius ipse ex litteris tuis quas ad eum misisti intellexit, hominis nullius apud te auctoritatem aut gratiam valere plus quam meam. Id ut re experiatur iterum et saepius te rogo*, 13.42.2 [53].) Saving clauses aside, Cicero frequently presents the performance of the request in a letter of recommendation as test of the addressee's regard for him.

When Cicero makes an appeal to his recipient to *act as if* the recommendation presented by his protégé counts as greatly significant, he involves the letter's subject as an audience for its performance, and the addressee as not only a social but also a dramatic actor. Many of Cicero's *litterae commendaticiae* either



end with this request or imply it by expressing the hope that the protégé will be given to know, by the addressee's response to him, how much friendship with Cicero is worth.¹² To Minucius Thermus, the governor of Asia, Cicero writes:¹³

peto abs te pro nostra coniunctissima necessitudine plurimisque officiis paribus ac mutuis ut voluntate auctoritate studio tuo perficias ut M. Anneius intellegat te et sibi amicum esse (quod non dubitat; saepe enim mecum locutus est) et multo amiciorem his meis litteris esse factum. In tuo toto imperio atque provincia nihil est quod mihi gratius facere possis; nam apud ipsum, gratissimum hominem atque optimum virum, quam bene positurus sis studium tuum atque officium dubitare te non existimo. (*Fam.* 13.55.2 [129])

I ask from you, on the basis of our particularly close ties and very many equivalent and shared services, that by your desire, authority, and effort, you ensure that Marcus Anneius may understand both that you are a friend to him (which he does not doubt, for often he has told me of it) and that you have been made a closer friend by far by this letter of mine. In the whole province and scope of your power, there is nothing that you could do to please me more. As for the man himself, a very grateful and excellent man, I believe you should have no doubt about how wisely you will place your energy and duty in him.

Thermus was the recipient of six letters from Cicero that remain extant, five of which are recommendations.¹⁴ Probably Cicero was more likely to solicit a performance in complicity from an addressee with whom he had an established friendship. The request itself communicates Cicero's confidence both in his own importance and in his connection with his addressee, whose acquiescence in the charade is presumed. The most striking example of this tactic comes from a letter to Q. Valerius Orca on behalf of Publius Cuspius (*Fam.* 13.6 [57]). Valerius is the recipient of three extant recommendations, including this letter, which is followed by a brief enclosure recommending one Publius Cornelius, a protégé of Cuspius (13.6a [58]). To Valerius, Cicero confides:

Ei ego pollicitus sum me ex intima nostra arte deprompturum mirificum genus commendationis. Id quoniam adsequi non possum, tu re velim efficias ut ille genere mearum litterarum incredibile quiddam perfectum arbitretur. Id facies si omne genus liberalitatis quod et ab humanitate et potestate tua proficisci poterit non modo re sed etiam verbis, vultu denique, exprompseris. (*Fam.* 13.6.3–4 [57])

I promised him [Cuspius] I'd produce a marvelous commendation of the profoundest artistry. Since I'm not up to following through, I hope you'll act so that he will think some amazing effect was wrought by the style of my letter.

You can demonstrate this not only in deed but also by words and even by your facial expression!

The acquiescence of Valerius in Cicero's request for a visible reaction to the letter in addition to his compliance with its main request will dramatically demonstrate Cicero's social worth to Cuspius and to his protégé Cornelius. Even if Valerius actually does value Cicero's good word highly, and would gladly assist Cicero's protégé, the manner of the request represents the recipient's expected acquiescence as complicity. This rhetoric makes the reader and the writer of the commendatory letter into accomplices in a performance that excludes the letter's subject, since he is implicitly unaware of the theatrical nature of the transaction. The protégé is uniquely likely to be present both at the sending and the reception of the recommendation, because he may be the letter's bearer. If he does carry the letter, he unwittingly carries the script for the performance for which he will be the audience.¹⁵

The theatrical aspect of a similar request is more muted in the conclusion of a letter written to Gaius Munatius on behalf of a friend's freedman, but Cicero makes an additional request of Munatius that, while not as conspiratorial as the request to Valerius, still stresses his need to impress the letter's beneficiary with its author's worth. He writes, "I really will be grateful if he will have understood from you that because for my sake and safety he weathered many dangers, and he sailed in the depth of winter, on behalf of your good will toward me, he also has acted pleasingly to you." (*Pergratum mihi feceris si ille intellexerit se, quod pro me salute mea multa pericula adierit, saepe hieme summa navigarit, pro tua erga me benevolentia gratum etiam tibi fecisse, Fam. 13.60.2 [55].*)¹⁶ By asking the letter's recipient to relay a verbal explanation of Cicero's kindness to the protégé, Cicero reasserts his own centrality. By asking him to supplement the letter addressed to him with a vocal, performed address, dictated by Cicero and addressed to the freedman, Cicero has made the letter's recipient into the bearer of a second message. In effect, he makes the letter's addressee into another, living letter.¹⁷

A letter to Publius Silius, governor of Bithynia, on behalf of the son of Titus Pinnius, exhibits both of the features I have just described. Pinnius, a young man for whom Cicero acts as a guardian (*tutor*), is owed a large amount of money by some Nicaeans. Cicero writes to Silius to ask his help in assuring payment. His letter is brief, but it contains the three essential elements. He explains his relationship to the senior T. Pinnius, in whose will he was named, and his responsibility toward his friend's son and chief heir. Then he makes his request.



Pergratum igitur mihi feceris, quoniam non modo reliqui tutores, qui sciunt quanti me facias, sed etiam puer ipse sibi persuasit te omnia mea causa facturum esse, si dederis operam, quoad tua fides dignitasque patietur, ut quam plurimum pecuniae Pinnio solvatur Nicaeensium nomine. (*Fam.* 13.61 [135])

Therefore, you will have acted very pleasingly toward me, since not only have the other trustees—who know how highly you esteem me—but the boy also has convinced himself that you will do everything for my sake, if you will give the matter your attention, as far as your good faith and worth permit, so that the greatest part of the money may be remitted to Pinnius in the name of the Nicaeans.

In this letter, Cicero's thanks precede his appeal to Silius, and both thanks and request are enfolded into a lengthy sentence that contains a parenthetical appeal for Silius's complicity ("qui sciunt quanti me facias").¹⁸ The phrase that flatters Silius's probity ("quoad tua fides . . . patietur") comes last. Cicero had written several recommendations to Silius already, and he may have felt he could dispense with formalities that might seem tiresome or empty if expressed in too many letters. Perhaps that is why this letter ends without additional promises of gratitude on Pinnius's part or Cicero's. Yet Cicero is careful to represent the importance of his addressee Silius's good will toward him in his petitioners' eyes, and to stress Silius's capacity for judging how this benevolence will be effectively employed.

The brevity of many of Cicero's commendatory letters is attributable to their functional character, to the great volume of commendations he produced, and to the fact that he repeatedly addressed a limited number of individuals. The need for a sort of shorthand is evident in a letter to Q. Valerius Orca, to whom Cicero anticipates addressing a number of related recommendations. He proposes adding a certain mark to indicate letters written for friends of Cuspius (*Fam.* 13.6.2 [57]). On the other hand, sometimes when Cicero's acquaintance with his addressee is extensive, or the situation is a particularly delicate one, a few paragraphs intervene between the salutation and the formulaic elements of establishing rapport, making a request, and expressing gratitude. Cicero's letter to Caesar recommending Precilius (13.15 [317]) is one example. Another is a letter to Gaius Memmius, who is best known to us as the dedicatee of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, but who was prominent as a politician as well as a litterateur until a condemnation for electoral bribery led him into exile at Athens in 52. Memmius owned property in Athens where Epicurus's house stood. In the first letter of Book 13, Cicero shoulders the cause of a Greek Epicurean named Patro who objects to Memmius's plans for the property, but he stresses that his

request has less to do with his approval of Patro's request than with his affection for Atticus.¹⁹ Since Atticus supports Patro's request, so does Cicero, but Cicero makes his reservations about Patro and his regard for Memmius very clear (13.1 [63]).²⁰ If we envision this transaction as a triangle, placing Patro in the position of protégé, Atticus's involvement in the exchange is not reflected. However, we can use a modified and doubled triangle to separately visualize Cicero's actual, epistolary request and the relationships that pre-date it. This process of building *amicitia* relationships by triangular means can be clearly seen in a letter written on behalf of one Lucius Oppius to Quintus Gallius, an official in Cilicia (13.43 [268]).²¹ Cicero writes that he commends Oppius both because he esteems him and because he has in his charge the business affairs of Lucius Egnatius Rufus, a man with whom Cicero is closely connected through both friendship and the exchange of numerous important services (*"officiis plurimis maximisque mihi coniunctus est"*). The information that situates the participants in the proposed exchange in relation to one another is all conveyed in the letter's first paragraph, as we would expect. Likewise as we expect, since Cicero solicits Gallius on behalf of Oppius, the proposed exchange is triangular, including the participation of writer, recipient, and the letter's subject, Oppius.

Yet the triangle created by Cicero, Oppius, and Gallius is not the only three-part relationship described in the letter. According to Cicero, another triangle has already been drawn prior to the writing of the letter at hand, a triangle that spurred this letter's composition. Presumably, L. Egnatius Rufus has already solicited Cicero on behalf of Oppius, although Cicero does not make this explicit. Furthermore, after reading Cicero's letter, it is possible that Gallius will have occasion to solicit someone else on Oppius's behalf. A whole network of triangular relationships is implied by the illumination, via this request, of one triangular link in the chain.

The first sentence of the second paragraph of *Fam.* 13.43 [268] obscures this schema, however. There, Cicero writes, "Accordingly, I ask that as you care for Oppius, who is present, so may you look after the affairs of the absent Egnatius with equal care, and as if they were my business." (*Oppium igitur praesentem ut diligas, Egnati absentis rem ut tueare aequae te peto ac si mea negotia essent, 13.43.2 [268].*) Cicero assimilates his own interests to those of other participants in the two triangles, and by doing so, he deemphasizes the triangle and rhetorically configures the transaction as a straight line reaching from Cicero to Gallius. Nevertheless, should the need arise, the triangular relationship will reassert itself, and the players change positions. The former receiver may become a sender; the former sender or receiver may become the subject of a new epistolary transaction.

This letter is especially interesting because Cicero makes overt the



presence/absence antithesis that helps structure all epistolary discourse, using this antithesis to articulate the social relationship he wants to forge with Gallius and to define the proxy roles both he and Oppius play. The roles of present and absent oscillate between two partners in all correspondence: at a letter's writing, the author is present and the recipient is absent. When the letter is received, its author is absent; its recipient is present. But in *Fam.* 13.43 [268], Cicero has shifted these roles onto actors in the social exchange negotiated by the letter and used them to accommodate four players, rather than two or even the usual three. He assimilates the interests of the doubly absent Egnatius to his own, as well as indirectly suggesting that Oppius, who is present, should substitute for Cicero, who is absent, just as a letter stands in for its absent author.

We have seen already how Cicero frequently assimilates his interests to those of his protégé, especially at the ends of letters. Cicero closes a letter written on behalf of Lucius Genucilius Curvus by informing his addressee: "Let this be the sum: whatever duty, favor, or honor you will have brought Genucilius, I will judge that you bring it to me and my business." (*Summa illa sit: quicquid officii benefici honoris in Genucilio contuleris, id te existimabo in me ipsum atque in rem meam contulisse*, *Fam.* 13.53.2 [130].) This declaration implies Cicero's gratitude and his readiness to reciprocate, should his addressee, Thermo, make a similar request. But in assimilating himself to Genucilius, Cicero minimizes the triangular aspect of this exchange. The rhetorical effect of this assimilation is to make the letter more literary and more polite, mystifying its essentially functional character. This stratagem adds polish and force to commendatory rhetoric. When the transaction the letter proposes is obscured by this complimentary rhetoric, its social function is disguised by the fiction of simple, two-way, mutual admiration. But a close reading of these letters, which repeatedly reconstruct and extend a complex web of social relationships, reveals the degree to which function dictates their form, while style simultaneously works to cloak function.

Domination and Uncertainty

In Cicero's commendatory letters the position held by each participant in the ongoing epistolary and social exchange changes as the various players create and strengthen ties by asking and receiving favors, and attempt to turn these transactions to their eventual advantage. The agonistic aspect of composing and exchanging recommendations might at first seem describable by a binary scheme of dominance and submission. It is certainly the case that when the social statuses of the letter-writer and addressee are only slightly differentiated,

even perhaps hinging on the success of the letter, the asymmetrical social relation between sender and recipient exaggerates the “power gradient” that “drives the letter-writing machine.”²² A mode of analysis that examines the oscillation in power that occurs between the (temporarily) dominant writing partner and the (temporarily) submissive reading partner does hold some limited value for our understanding of Roman *litterae commendaticiae*, and this terminology vividly conveys the dynamics of such relationships. But the gap between rhetorical relationships existing in the words of the correspondents and in reality ensures that one partner is never always dominant and one always submissive. The delays built into epistolary dialogue by the separation of correspondents and the ensuing artificiality of their conversation reinforce this rhetorical effect. Rhetorically, the letter-writer must place himself in a vulnerable position as he makes a request. He can neither immediately gauge the reception of his request nor instantly respond. Cicero often places himself in a passive position vis-à-vis his addressee, by asking him for a particular response that he will not be present to receive. At the time of the letter’s reading, Cicero will be absent, and so will be powerless to counter the potential damage to his reputation from a negative response. His rhetorical stance is passive, therefore, while he is actually actively wielding the pen, but it is by allowing his addressee the power to grant his request that his own status is affirmed and augmented. Yet the imperative to have one’s letters and gifts reciprocated in order to maintain one’s status engendered significant and undeniable anxiety. Cicero’s worries about bestowing a dedication without certainty that the favor would be duly returned, which occasioned the admonitory letter to Varro discussed in chapter 1 (*Fam.* 9.8 [254]), are illustration enough that this tension existed.

A simple antithesis of dominance and submission cannot describe Cicero’s standard move of requesting an addressee’s complicity in impressing the letter’s subject and carrier, because this tactic requires the participation of three: two actors and their audience. Cicero asks the letter’s addressee, the apparently passive recipient, to become a co-conspirator with him, which grants the addressee a share of power.²³ This power is potential at the time of writing, poised to flatter its recipient but not yet a threat to Cicero’s active position. Cicero becomes vulnerable when the letter is *read* and he is no longer present. At that point his social power to grant favors (as opposed to his rhetorical power to request them) is all potential because it rests in the hands of the addressee, who as reader is already rendered rhetorically dominant by the wording of the letter, and is poised to become actively dominant, both in writing back and as the guarantor of Cicero’s social prestige, by granting the favor Cicero has requested. The letter’s recipient exercises his power on both the recommendation’s subject and its author, but he is expected to do so by yielding to their requests. The



fact that everyone involved profits when commendatory letters are circulating smoothly, however, is more evidence of the inadequacy of dominant and submissive as categories for the actors in these transactions. The triangularity of reciprocation in gift and letter circulation at Rome ensured that this process was not a zero-sum game.

Nevertheless, for Cicero and his contemporaries, correspondence involved making oneself repeatedly vulnerable, rhetorically and socially.²⁴ This was the cost of communicating by letter, as well as the cost of the social prestige that accrued with such transactions. In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu writes, "Dominant agents cannot be content with letting the system that they dominate follow its own course. . . . [T]hey have to work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination which even then are never entirely certain."²⁵ In Cicero's milieu, letters of recommendation, along with other familiar correspondence and various other more and less official practices, shared the work of domination that Bourdieu describes. As the exposition of their rhetoric and structure undertaken so far should suggest, the "gentle violence" of social domination through correspondence was not easy, nor were its results always predictable or assured. For instance, what might happen when one of the participants in an exchange of *litterae commendaticiae* failed or refused to play his role? In several instances, Cicero failed to manipulate relationships and the circulation of favors satisfactorily by means of epistolary rhetoric. Letters cannot dictate the actions of participants who do not recognize or accede to the social rules they reflect, but Cicero's reactions to two of these misbehaving social agents reveal the usually implicit connections between rhetoric and practice.

Homines Ingrati: Dionysius and Gavius

So far, this chapter has concentrated mostly on the exchange of *litterae commendaticiae* and protégés among the political and economic elite. We have not so far differentiated these from exchanges that involve recommendations of freedmen or slaves, in which the differing social status of at least one of the exchange's participants creates a power gradient that is permanent and steep. It appears that when a member of the Roman elite lent a member of his household to a friend, the freedman or slave would return home bearing a letter of thanks that commended his performance and re-commended him to his master. The premiere example of this kind of exchange between Atticus and Cicero is also the best example of what happens when the promises made in *litterae commendaticiae* are not fulfilled by the protégé, who was in this case a freedman of Atticus named Dionysius.

Dionysius, an educated Greek, makes frequent appearances in Cicero's letters to Atticus. At the opening of one letter, in response to Atticus's report of the name his newest freedman has adopted, Cicero complacently recalls its similarity to Dionysius's name. Marcus Pomponius Dionysius is the namesake of Cicero and Atticus both, "united out of me and you" (*ex me et ex te iunctus Dionysius M. Pomponius*, *Att.* 4.15.1 [90]). Dionysius seems to have been on more or less permanent loan to Cicero from Atticus from late 54 through December of 50, acting primarily as tutor to Marcus and Quintus *iuniores*, and even accompanying the household abroad for Cicero's term as governor of Cilicia (52/51). Cicero's initial reception of Dionysius into his household was enthusiastic. On joining Pompey's staff as his *legatus* in November of 54, an office that necessitated his dwelling outside the pomerium, he wrote to Atticus: "Many greetings to Dionysius, for whom I have not only kept a place, but have built one!" (*Dionysio plurimam salutem; cui quidem ego non modo servavi sed etiam aedificavi locum*, *Att.* 4.19.2 [93]).

However, the relationship soured. When Cicero left Rome with other supporters of Pompey in 49, withdrawing to his villa at Formiae while he tried to decide whether it would be necessary or wise to leave Italy, he apparently expected Dionysius to join him there of his own accord, or at least with little prompting. He did not. At first Cicero reacted with sarcasm,²⁶ but when Dionysius flatly refused his request, he complained bitterly to Atticus about the freedman's ingratitude. These letters provide a record of what could happen when the social exchange transacted through recommendations went awry because one participant refused to recognize or conform to unspoken rules. But an earlier letter to Atticus hints at a more clearly *rhetorical* failure by Dionysius, according to Cicero. When, in December of 50, Cicero sent Dionysius back to Atticus, he sent a letter with him, re-commending him to the master whom, to his credit, Dionysius was "burning" to rejoin.²⁷ On receiving Dionysius back into his household, Atticus wrote to Cicero. Like all of Atticus's letters, this one does not survive, but in *his* reply, Cicero quotes from it: "Dionysius, an excellent man, as I also know him to be, as well as extremely learned and devoted to you, came to Rome on December 16th. He brought a letter to me from you." ("Dionysius, vir optimus, ut mihi quoque est perspectus, et doctissimus tuique amantissimus, Romam venit XV Kal. Ian. et litteras a te mihi reddidit," *Att.* 7.7.1 [130]).²⁸ So Cicero opens his letter in response. His disgruntlement becomes clear as he continues.

Tot enim verba sunt de Dionysio in epistula tua; illud †putato† non adscribis, "et tibi gratias egit." Atqui certe ille agere debuit et, si esset factum, quae tua est humanitas, adscripsisses. Mihi autem nulla de eo παλινφδία datur propter



superioris epistolae testimonium. Sit igitur sane bonus vir; hoc enim ipsum bene fecit, quod mihi sui cognoscendi penitus etiam istam facultatem dedit. (*Att.* 7.7.1 [130])

That is the sum of words about Dionysius in your letter; you don't add something like "and he expressed his gratitude." And yet, surely he ought to have expressed it, and if he had done so, it would be out of your kindly character not to have added it. Nevertheless, I can't compose a palinode about him after the testimonial of my earlier letter. Let it be said that he really is a good man; for he did this thing well—he gave me insight into his innermost thinking.

This episode, where the failure of courtesy was either epistolary or directly connected with the letter-exchange, was a prelude to the quarrel in 49, which Cicero conceived of as a failure of deference. Dionysius not only refused to bow to status by coming to Cicero's aid; he also refused to employ the polite rhetorical evasions that might have made his behavior possible for Cicero to endure without offense. Cicero fumes to Atticus:

Quibus litteris ita respondit ut ego nemini cuius causam non reciperem; semper enim "si potero," "si ante suscepta causa non impediar"; numquam reo cuiquam tam humili, tam sordido, tam nocenti, tam alieno tam praecise negavi quam hic mihi plane <sine> ulla exceptione praecidit. Nihil cognovi ingratus; in quo vitio nihil mali non inest. (*Att.* 8.4.2 [156])

He responded to my letter in a manner I never would have used toward someone whose case I was going to refuse. I always say, "if I'm able," "if I'm not prevented by a previous commitment"; there has never been a defendant so poor, so shabby, so criminal, so foreign, that I have absolutely refused him as he refused me, flatly, without any condition. I have experienced nothing more ungrateful—and ingratitude is a fault that shares in every vice!

At Atticus's behest, Dionysius made a belated visit to Formiae, where instead of apologizing and pledging his loyalty, as Cicero seems to have expected, he offered excuses relating to business to explain his absence from Cicero's side. These excuses are of the sort Cicero seems to have wanted in the epistolary communication from Dionysius that provoked his angry letter to Atticus, but now, when they were delivered in person, he resented their flimsiness. The exchange ends with Cicero bitterly reporting to Atticus: "I yielded to him. I sent him away, as a tutor for the boys, not gladly, but willingly, as an ungrateful man" (*Morem gessi; dimisi a me, ut magistrum Ciceronum non libenter, ut hominem ingratum non invitus, Att.* 8.10 [159]).²⁹ The ingratitude

of Dionysius was complicated by his freedman status. A freedman was supposed to match the affections of his former master, and to act as his proxy as reliably as a loyal slave.³⁰ When Cicero and Dionysius were on good terms, Dionysius acted as a double for Atticus, at least in Cicero's affections. When Cicero writes about how much he misses Atticus, he misses Dionysius, too: "I swear I cannot be away from you with a calm spirit; yet it is no wonder that I miss you, when I long so greatly for Dionysius!" (Non mehercule aequo animo te careo; te autem quid mirum, qui Dionysium tanto opere desiderem? *Att.* 4.18.5 [92].)

Of course, freedmen had no monopoly on ingratitude. A second example of a misbehaving protégé is recorded in the letters to Atticus. Cicero admitted a person named Gavius into his good graces and onto his staff in Cilicia at the behest of an epistolary recommendation from Marcus Brutus, a man whose principles Cicero admired, and whose politics he attempted, at least at times, to guide. The cagey rhetoric of their exchange of consolatory letters, discussed in chapter 2, indicates the complexity of their relationship. Because of Cicero's friendship with Atticus, who initially had brought Cicero and Brutus together, it was important to Cicero to build good relations with Brutus, and acting on his recommendations would be an expected part of doing so. And since Atticus had fostered Cicero's acquaintance with Brutus, failure to fulfill Brutus's requests could be construed as an indirect slight against Atticus.³¹ This gives Cicero all the more reason to report on his dealings with Brutus's protégé Gavius to his friend Atticus, whose protégé Brutus, in a sense, was.

Brutus had requested prefectures for two men, Gavius and Scaptius, who were minding Brutus's interests in Cappadocia.³² Cicero reported to Atticus that he had already granted a prefecture to Scaptius when he discovered that Scaptius was acting as Brutus's agent to recover a debt from the people of Salamis (*Att.* 5.21.10–12 [114]). Cicero attempted to resolve the situation in a manner that would be acceptable to all parties and would not compromise his principles, but he was unable to satisfy Scaptius, and unwilling—after his discovery that Scaptius was a "businessman" (*negotiator*) with a financial interest in the region he would administer—to make him a prefect (*Att.* 6.2.7–9 [116]). After Cicero's account of this contretemps, he does not mention Scaptius again. Instead, he concentrates his displeasure on the ill manners of Gavius, who, after accepting a prefecture from Cicero, first failed to perform the duties of the office and then rudely accosted Cicero with demands for his pay. Cicero seems to have considered that Gavius had forfeited his office by his negligence. He recounts the episode to Atticus in some detail, ending with a reference to Gavius's recommender: "If Brutus can be moved by the words of this good-for-nothing, you can love him all by yourself; I will not be your rival." (Huius



nebulonis oratione si Brutus moveri potest, licebit eum solus ames, me aemulum non habebis, *Att.* 6.3.7 [117].)³³ In other words, if Brutus's friendship with Cicero depends on a favor performed for Gavius, Cicero will leave Atticus to it.

The connections that this exchange describes go beyond the rhetoric internal to Atticus's epistolary recommendation of Brutus, and Brutus's recommendation letter for Gavius, neither of which is extant. But the relationships recorded by Cicero's letters to Atticus could be visualized as a pair of triangles, the second of which depends on the first. Although the process was interrupted in this case by the ingratitude of Gavius (and perhaps of Brutus, too), this exchange suggests how relationships recorded and performed by a series of epistolary requests could extend an individual's social network, not simply through a "chain of *officia*," as Elizabeth Deniaux has characterized the workings of Roman friendship, but also through a chain of interlinked people.³⁴ As a group, Cicero's letters of recommendation are the most openly instrumental letters in his correspondence. Their utilitarian functionality does not preclude artistry. However, the considerable stylistic elegance that some of Cicero's *litterae commendaticiae* achieve always serves pragmatic ends. Unsurprisingly, the euphemistic tactics specific to recommendation letters are more easily penetrated than those of less formulaic correspondence, and the confusion of objects and people that is inherent in gift exchange is especially prominent in these letters, in which protégés often occupy the same position as an object might, passed from giver to receiver. Yet since a successful recommendation advances an agent rather than an object, and all three participants in a transaction may initiate or be involved in further transactions, the increase of the gift in this kind of exchange is potentially very great. Each participant in a transaction stands to benefit from its success, and each successful transaction could widen or strengthen the network of *amicitia* in which all the actors were enmeshed.³⁵

PART TWO



SENECA

Commercium Epistularum:
The Gift Refigured

5



FROM PRACTICE TO METAPHOR

A complex system of social negotiation carried on by familiar correspondence and other practices involved in the production and maintenance of *amicitia* confronted Seneca as, through his *Moral Epistles*, he undertook a redefinition of Roman friendship. Two aspects of this system were especially prominent, and problematic, for Seneca's project. First, success depended on personal reputation. One's own *fama* and *dignitas*, and, to use a modern term, "face," were enormously important. Moreover, maintaining an individual, personal reputation required constant diligence in securing the cooperation of others. The more dependents and friends a man had, the greater he was, but conversely, the more attenuated his control over his reputation became. Both of these facts were problematic for Seneca. The mediation of even one intervening layer, a single third person between two friends—a mediation that was basic to the chain of *officia* and people that constituted friendship in Cicero's world as well as to the movement of correspondence—was objectionable from Seneca's Stoic standpoint. For Seneca, the insertion of a third person into an exchange envisioned as direct introduces opportunities for duplicity, hypocrisy, and posturing that are antithetical to his stated aim of cultivating a single, consistent, completely integrated persona. Moreover, a status that depends on a network of other agents for its maintenance cannot reliably deliver the perfect autonomy that the wise person aspires to achieve.

In the second half of this study, we turn to Seneca's *Moral Epistles* to examine the kind of friendship Seneca envisioned for himself and Lucilius, and to discover why he may have enacted and commemorated this friendship



through a collection of letters, despite their hopeless entanglement in rhetoric and practices that he at the same time rejected and also attempted to reinvent. This chapter examines how Seneca uses Ciceronian epistolary rhetoric and practice as a negative model, not only for how to write letters and what to write in them, but also for how to live, while at the same time pointedly disengaging his own letters from real participation in the Roman gift economy. Seneca exposes and critiques the inexorable web of social obligations that correspondence helped to create and perpetuate, and he accomplishes his critique in part by reemphasizing, and sometimes re-literalizing, the familiar gestures and vocabulary of euphemized gift exchange. In the first three books of his collection, which abound in references to figurative gifts, debts, payment, and profits, and in remarks on the paradoxical nature of ownership, Seneca begins the process of prodding his readers to rethink not merely their expectations for epistolary rhetoric and this letter collection, but also their habits as readers and as participants in Roman social practices more generally.

Cicero as Model and Foil

The opening of Letter 118 gives a rare instance of Seneca's direct invocation of Cicero as his epistolary predecessor.¹ Yet Cicero supplies precedents for both correspondence and friendship that Seneca seems to reject entirely.

Exigis a me frequentiores epistulas. Rationes conferamus: solvendo non eris. Convenerat quidem ut tua priora essent: tu scriberes, ego rescriberem. Sed non ero difficilis: bene credi tibi scio. Itaque in antecessum dabo nec faciam quo Cicero, vir disertissimus, facere Atticum iubet, ut etiam "si rem nullam habebit, quod in buccam venerit scribat." Numquam potest deesse quod scribam, ut omnia illa quae Ciceronis implent epistulas transeam: quis candidatus laboret; quis alienis, quis suis viribus pugnet; quis consulatum fiducia Caesaris, quis Pompei, quis arcae petat; quam durus sit fenerator Caecilius, a quo minoris centesimis propinqui nummum movere non possint. (*Ep.* 118.1–2)

You have been demanding more frequent letters from me. Let us compare accounts: you will not be on the credit side. We had indeed made the agreement that your part came first, that you should write the first letters, and that I should answer. However, I shall not be disagreeable; I know that it is safe to trust you, so I shall pay in advance, and yet not do as the eloquent Cicero bids Atticus do: "Even if you have nothing to say, write whatever enters your head." For there will always be something for me to write about, even omitting all the kinds of news with which Cicero fills his correspondence: what candidate is in difficulties, who is striving on borrowed resources, and who is on his own; who

is a candidate for the consulship relying on Caesar, or on Pompey, or on his own strongbox; what a merciless usurer is Caecilius, out of whom his friends cannot screw a penny for less than one percent each month.

First, Seneca scorns the practice of writing letters simply to keep in touch when at a loss for news. Then it appears that he also objects to Ciceronian letters that were composed for the purpose of relaying news. Seneca disparages these letters for their content—that is, the social, political, and financial gossip of the day. His letters to Lucilius are designed instead to be a venue for and means of sustained self-examination, philosophical meditation, and teaching. If doing ethical philosophy by epistolary means were Seneca's sole aim, however, there would be no need for him to evoke Ciceronian letter writing at all. The letters attributed to Plato and various Cynic philosophers, as well as the letters of Epicurus, would supply precedent and models in plenty.² The fact that he keeps Cicero before his readers' eyes throughout the collection suggests that Cicero supplies something beyond an epistolary model.³ In fact, it is not Cicero's letters in themselves that are problematic for Seneca, but the whole nexus of rhetoric and practice that Ciceronian correspondence participated in, recorded, and partly constituted. Seneca condemns the social instrumentality of Ciceronian letters and their entanglement with other aristocratic discourses and practices of public contention and display.

Seneca's collection is more similar to Cicero's correspondence with Atticus than to the *Ad familiares*, insofar as his letters are all addressed to a single friend who himself remains mute throughout, except when ostensibly quoted back to himself by Seneca.⁴ As I noted in the Introduction, however, the *Moral Epistles* were written within the narrow window between Seneca's withdrawal from Nero's court in 62 and his death in 65, rather than over a span of almost twenty-five years, as the letters to Atticus were. Their chronology in dramatic time is even more compressed. Internal references to the passing seasons suggest a span of one year, or possibly two.⁵ As the collection now stands, 124 letters in twenty books, Letter 118 opens its final book. The direct invocation of Ciceronian letters there, so late in the sequence but prominently positioned, underlines the persisting importance of the Ciceronian themes whose presence pervades the collection's early books.⁶

The language of Letter 118 sharpens Seneca's differentiation of his values and interests from those of Cicero. In the second sentence, Seneca refers to his correspondence with Lucilius in pointedly fiscal terms. He is keeping an account (*rationes*) of their exchange, in which individual letters are payments that erase debts (*solvendo*). But in spite of the aggressively fiscal terminology of the opening, Seneca claims that his letters to Lucilius do not participate in the



social bookkeeping in which Cicero's letters, as Seneca represents them, reveal. Rather than reporting the false ambitions and attainments of others, Seneca writes about his own moral progress: "It is preferable to deal with one's own ills rather than with another's—to sift oneself and see for how many vain things one is a candidate and cast a vote for none of them" (*Sua satius est mala quam aliena tractare, se excutere et videre quam multarum rerum candidatus sit, et non suffragari*, 118.2). Seneca's selection of Ciceronian letter-topics is, unsurprisingly, tendentious: elections, and how money influences them (*"fiducia . . . arcae"*). He implies that writing letters about such venal matters is ignoble, but he quietly lays claim to fiscal metaphor to characterize his kind of correspondence (*"rationes . . . solvendo"*). Likewise, having condemned politics as an improper subject for letters, he recuperates the political as metaphor by referring to philosophical self-examination in terms of electoral politics (*"candidatus . . . suffragari"*).⁷ Seneca's transformation here of republican political striving into self-improving metaphor reminds his readers of a significant difference between his circumstances and career and those of Cicero.⁸ Whereas annual elections for magistracies had once been a major proving ground for republican aristocratic ambitions, and in Cicero's time frequently spawned bribery trials that presented additional opportunities for winning glory, elections functioned exclusively as metaphors in Senecan Rome.⁹ Seneca could not have filled his letters with news of electoral politics, even if he were inclined to do so. More generally, his use of metaphor here exemplifies a general, and essential, characteristic of his philosophical prose. Shadi Bartsch has argued persuasively that Seneca urges "a metaphorical approach to the world" in order to come to grips with the true nature of reality, and that for Seneca, "coming to a proper understanding" of things as they really are "can rely on metaphorical recasting alone."¹⁰

Significantly, Seneca's portrayal of Cicero's correspondence in Letter 118 does not acknowledge its functionality. He insinuates that gossiping in letters is merely a means of passing time. In fact, Cicero's letters did real work: they not only witnessed and recorded political, financial, and familial wheeling and dealing, but they often played a major role in accomplishing these negotiations. Notably, the social usefulness of letters holds just as true for those written to Atticus as for those *ad familiares*. But Seneca downplays or simply ignores the legitimate and considerable usefulness of Ciceronian correspondence. Instead, by criticizing Ciceronian epistolary euphemism, labeling it as hypocrisy and double-talk, and loudly rejecting it, Seneca creates a distraction that provides cover for the instrumental dimension of his own letters. The letters to Lucilius substitute philosophical for social instrumentality and transfer the economic vocabulary of Cicero's letters from the realm of social practice

to that of metaphor. As Bartsch has described Seneca's "double procedure," he strips the accepted sense from a given concept, word, or judgment, revealing its mere reality, then he bids us to refigure it.¹¹ What we regard as possessions are merely loans; deprivation and death become blessings, and a means to freedom. In the remainder of this chapter, with this double process of exposure and refiguration in mind, we examine Seneca's use of the vocabulary of gift, debt, property, possession, and wealth. He exploits this figurative nexus in order to draw attention to the operation of conventional understandings of obligation in familiar correspondence, in friendship, and in life, and to begin training his reader to question and reject those conventions and the obligatory actions they entail.

Gift and Debt: Exposing Obligation

Fiscal language pervades the *Moral Epistles*.¹² It is especially prominent in the first three books, where gifts, debts, and small sums of money persistently recur as figures for the philosophical *sententiae* that the letters contain. Each of the twenty-nine letters in the first three books includes an apposite quotation from another philosopher, most often Epicurus.¹³ These maxims provide Lucilius with a sort of "thought for the day," a brief formulation of an idea to consider at length, an aid to the daily progress of the aspiring wise man. Their content varies from admonitions to regulate or eliminate the passions to cleverly paradoxical definitions of true friendship, true wealth, and true repose. Sometimes a maxim sums up a major theme of a letter, and sometimes signals a departure from it. Often but not always, the maxim comes near the end of the letter. Sometimes it is the final sentence, though usually Seneca writes a few more lines to explain the thought or express it more fully. Our concern is less with the content of these *sententiae*, however, than with the vocabulary of obligation, especially financial obligation, that Seneca uses to introduce many of them.

The verb *debere* makes its first appearance in the first letter of the collection, when Seneca remarks, "No one thinks he owes anything when he has gotten some of another person's time" (*nemo se iudicet quicquam debere qui tempus accepit*, 1.3). In first and second person (*debeo*, *debes*), this verb reappears persistently in the early books. It initially occurs in conjunction with a maxim, figured as a day's wages, in Letter 6: "since I owe you a daily payment" (*quoniam diurnam tibi mercedulam debeo*, 6.7). Seneca discharges his debt early in the ninth letter: "You ask how you can make a friend quickly. I will tell you, if you and I agree that I have paid what I owe you right away, and as far as this letter goes, we are even." (*Quaeris quomodo amicum cito facturum sit? Dicam, si illud mihi tecum convenerit, ut statim tibi solvam quod debeo et quantum ad hanc*



epistulam paria faciamus, 9.6.) In the eighteenth letter, Seneca imagines that Lucilius demands payment: "But now I will begin to wrap up my letter. 'First, pay what you owe,' you say." (Sed iam incipiamus epistulam complicare. "Prius" inquis "redde quod debes," 18.14.) At the conclusion of the twenty-seventh letter, Seneca links the payment of his debt with the conclusion of the letter: "But for now, accept what I owe and fare well." (Sed accipe iam quod debeo et vale, 27.9.)

At Letter 23.9, Seneca introduces a maxim from Epicurus by writing: "This is the place for paying my debt." (Hic est locus solvendi aeris alieni.) The phrase *aes alienum*, an expression for debt, occurs at the end of Letter 19, and occurs again in Letter 29, the last in the long sequence of letters that Seneca concludes with a maxim. A flurry of fiscal terms emphasizes this final payment: "If you had any shame, you would forgive my last installment. But I won't beg off even the last of my debt, and what I owe you, I'll pay." (Si pudorem haberes, ultimam mihi pensionem remisisses; sed ne ego quidem me sordide geram in finem aeris alieni et tibi quod debeo inpingam, 29.10.) *Aes alienum* is reinforced by the verbs *remisso*, *inpingo*, and *debeo*, and the noun *pensio*, a weighing out, as of bronze.

Seneca refers to the maxims inconsistently, sometimes as gifts (*munus*, *munusculum*), but more often as payments on a debt (*quod debeo*, *aes alienum*), profits (*lucrum*, *lucellum*), or small sums of other kinds (*stips*, *peculium*, *viaticum*).¹⁴ His persistence in labeling these "little gifts" at the same time calls to mind Ciceronian precedent and distances Seneca from it. On several occasions, Cicero or his friends refer to literary efforts that accompany their letters as *munuscula*, but a mere sentence quoted from another thinker within the letter would not qualify.¹⁵ Moreover, the variety of words Seneca uses to label the maxims suggests some difficulty in distinguishing between a freely given gift and a payment in cash or in kind owed for services rendered or anticipated.¹⁶ We are invited to question whether there is any true difference between the two. The vocabulary that Seneca uses to introduce the maxim in Letter 17 encourages this line of thought, by casually comparing Lucilius's expectation of a few words to live by from his philosopher friend to the Persian monarch's demand for tribute from his subjects: "I would have been able to close this letter, had I not trained you badly. It is impossible for anyone to greet Parthian kings without a gift, and I can't say farewell to you for free." (Poteram hoc loco epistulam claudere, nisi te male instituisssem. Reges Parthos non potest quisquam salutare sine munere; tibi valedicere non licet gratis, 17.11.)¹⁷ By pointing out the obligatory nature of these "gifts" ("non potest . . . sine munere"), Seneca exposes their true nature as payments, obtained from their givers by more or less subtle coercion.

Claiming the Common Wealth

The emphasis on financial matters in the first three books is not restricted to the metaphors introducing maxims. Wealth, its acquisition, its nature, and the nature of ownership are topics many times revisited. The first letter ends with a proverbial saying: “Thrift is too late when it comes to the dregs” (*sera parsimonia in fundo est*, 1.5). The second letter ends with a meditation on the first borrowed maxim in the collection, a saying that Seneca has obtained (“*nactus sum*”) from Epicurus: “An honorable and happy thing is poverty” (“*honesta . . . res est laeta paupertas*,” 2.5). A series of rhetorical questions follows, moderating the Epicurean maxim to demonstrate its applicability to the economic circumstances of Seneca’s audience: “What does it matter how much a man has in his strongbox, how much lies in his granaries, how much he pastures or lends, if he covets another’s property, and if he adds up not what he has, but what he has to get? What is moderation in riches?” (*Quid enim refert quantum illi in arca, quantum in horreis iaceat, quantum pascat aut feneret, si alieno imminet, si non adquisita sed adquirenda computat? Quis sit divitiarum modus quaeris?* 2.6). Letter 4 also takes its maxim from Epicurus, and the subject again is wealth: “Poverty arranged by the law of nature is great riches” (“*magnae divitiae sunt lege naturae composita paupertas*,” 4.10). In this letter Seneca introduces the words of Epicurus as “something taken from another man’s garden” (*hoc . . . ex alienis hortulis sumptum*, 4.10). *Sumptum* can suggest buying something or simply appropriating it. Margaret Graver suggests that the verb marks Seneca’s borrowing as unlicensed, “a kind of theft or at least a forcible removal.”¹⁸ This suggestion may find support in the contrast Seneca’s introduction to the maxim in Letter 5 presents. That saying is from a fellow Stoic, Hecato, and concentrates financial metaphor in the noun *lucellum*, “little profit.” Seneca writes, “So I may share the little profit of this day with you” (*diei lucellum tecum communem*, 5.7). Whereas the sayings from Epicurus are borrowed from a foreign camp (“*aliena castra*,” 2.5) or garden (“*ex alienis hortulis*,” 4.10), taking a maxim from the common property of one’s own school seems unremarkable. But after Seneca has, by implication, encouraged his reader to suspect him of theft, in the final lines of the last letter in Book 1, he imagines Lucilius making the charge explicitly, and succinctly refutes it: “Epicurus said that! What are you doing with another person’s property? What is true is mine.” (“Epicurus” inquis “*dixit: quid tibi cum alieno?*” *Quod verum est meum est*, 12.11.) Further, he adds in the letter’s last words, “the best things are held in common” (*quae optima sunt esse communia*, 12.11).

Seneca’s meditation on the true nature of ownership continues, couched in



financial metaphors, in the next book. Letter 14 connects the content of the letter's maxim and the citation of its source to the figure that introduces it.

Nunc ad cotidianam stipem manum porrigis. Aurea te stipe implebo, et quia facta est auri mentio, accipe quemadmodum *usus fructusque* eius tibi esse gratior possit. "Is maxime divitiis *fruitur* qui minime divitiis indiget." "Ede" inquis "auctorem." Ut scias quam benigni simus, propositum est aliena laudare: Epicuri est aut Metrodori aut alicuius ex illa officina. Et quid interest quis dixerit? Omnibus dixit. Qui eget divitiis timet pro illis; nemo autem sollicito bono *fruitur*. Adicere illis aliquid studet; dum de incremento cogitat, oblitus est *usus*. (*Ep.* 14.17–18)

Now you stretch out your hand for your daily allowance. I will give you a coin of gold, and since I have mentioned gold, let me tell you how its use (*usus*) and enjoyment of its benefits (*fructus*) may bring you greater pleasure. "He enjoys the benefits (*fruitur*) of riches most who has least need of riches." "Reveal your source," you say. So you may know how generous I am, it is my intent to praise the dicta of other schools. The phrase belongs to Epicurus or Metrodorus, or someone from that particular think-shop. But what does it matter who said it? He spoke to everyone. A person who is needy for riches is fearful on their account. No one, moreover, enjoys (*fruitur*) a good that provokes anxiety. He is anxious to add a little more. While he puzzles over increasing his wealth, he is forgetful of its use (*usus*).

Seneca repeatedly refers to the "use" and "enjoyment" of wealth in this passage, without ever referring to its outright possession. His insistence on *usus* and *fructus*, or the right of usufruct, describes in Roman legal terms the only kind of ownership that a Stoic would consider possible for men.¹⁹ To make a claim to absolute possession of any earthly good is delusional, given the hazards of fortune. Fortune can alienate any, or all, of our worldly possessions from us at whim.²⁰ Seneca bestows on Lucilius here a saying that he credits to the Epicureans, but recounting it in terms of Roman law, he supplements its meaning by making it a comment not just on the nature of riches (both Stoics and Epicureans would agree: they provoke anxiety outweighing the pleasure they give), but on the nature of ownership. Moreover, Seneca's rendition of the Epicurean maxim makes a sly comment on Lucilius's imagined response, his demand for an author. Seneca winks as he praises his own "generosity" in praising "foreign" goods. The joke lies in the fact that he has already established, at the end of Letter 12, that the best ideas are held in common. Thus, his praise in Letter 14 is for a *sententia* he can claim as his own. By his reckoning, it is inaccurate to

call the maxim foreign (*aliena*), and to refer to it as property of any particular school is merely conventional courtesy.

In the first twenty-nine *Moral Epistles*, Seneca gives careful attention to demarcating the gift or payment of the maxim from his own words—that is, the body of the letter. From Letter 30 onward, however, he changes tack.²¹ Instead of attaching gifts or payments, in the form of other men's sayings, to individual letters, Seneca begins to draw attention to his own words, to whole letters, and to the dialogue that correspondence carries on in its entirety as an exchange that produces benefit and obligation. At the end of Letter 30 the verb *debeo* occurs again, but Seneca does not “pay what he owes.” Instead, he makes a joke about the implicit rules that govern correspondence: “I ought to be afraid that you will hate such a long letter worse than death.” (*Sed vereri debeo ne tam longas epistulas peius quam mortem oderis*, 30.17.)²² Seneca's ludicrous anxiety about imposing on his friend's patience exemplifies the social nicety characteristic of the public career he has persuaded Lucilius to abandon.²³ The polite absurdity of the letter's penultimate sentence (30.18) neatly sets up its conclusion: “And so I make an ending. But as for you, think about death constantly, so that you may never fear it. Farewell.” (*Itaque finem faciam: tu tamen mortem ut numquam timeas semper cogita. Vale.*) Not for the first time, Seneca turns a convention of epistolary rhetoric, here an apology for excessive length, into a prompt toward philosophical activity.²⁴ In doing so, he lightly suggests that life and correspondence are in some sense coextensive, or even interchangeable.

Claiming the Self

Alongside the progressive questioning and redefinition of wealth and ownership, Seneca nudges his reader toward a parallel probe into the nature of self-possession. Letter 12 well illustrates the overlap in terms and the simultaneity of these inquiries. We have already looked at the letter's very end. But Seneca begins the letter's conclusion in section 10, making use of a pattern that is already familiar. He writes, “But I ought to wrap up this letter” (*Sed iam debeo epistulam includere*), and imagines Lucilius's response: “What? Is it coming like this, with no allowance for me?” (“*Sic*” inquis “*sine ullo ad me peculio veniet?*” 12.10.) The word *peculium*, which I have translated here as “allowance,” properly refers to money treated as belonging to a party who is legally incapable of managing it. Typically, *peculium* refers to a slave's nest egg, by means of which he might eventually purchase his freedom.²⁵ By making Lucilius use *peculium* to describe the maxim he expects to find at the end of the letter, Seneca contributes to his ongoing characterization of Lucilius and significantly



harks back to the opening lines of the collection's first letter. "Claim yourself for yourself" (*vindica te tibi*), he writes there, evoking the legal formulae for both the manumission of slaves and the recovery of alienated property.²⁶ At the outset of the collection, Seneca figures his addressee as a person dispossessed of his rightful possession, himself, and at the same time suggests that Lucilius may be enslaved by external demands that he neither fully acknowledges nor understands.²⁷ The imagined demand by Lucilius for *peculium* at the end of Book 1 shows that the work of self-vindication that Seneca has begun to urge upon his friend is far from complete.

In Letter 1, Seneca's command for Lucilius to vindicate himself seems to concern only Lucilius. No one will suffer a compensating loss from his potential gain. However, the opening sections of Letter 95, an exceptionally long letter on a difficult topic that Seneca claims Lucilius had at an earlier time requested, indicate that the writer is well aware of the coercive potential inherent even in his and Lucilius's correspondence.²⁸ He jokingly reminds his addressee of the Roman proverb equivalent to "be careful what you wish for" (*et verbum publicum perire non patior*: "postea noli rogare quod inpetrare nolueris," 95.1). He goes on to compare the obligation Lucilius may now feel to read his enormous letter to the pressure exerted by etiquette and ambition on those engaged in typical activities of elite Roman social life:

Interdum enim enixe petimus id quod recusaremus si quis offerret. Haec sive levitas est sive vernilitas puniunda est promittendi facilitate. Multa videri volumus velle sed nolumus. Recitator historiam ingentem attulit minutissime scriptam, artissime plectam, et magna parte perlecta "desinam" inquit "si vultis": adclamatur "recita, recita" ab iis qui illum ommutescere illic cupiunt. . . . Ego me ommissa misericordia vindicabo et tibi ingentem epistulam inpingam, quam tu si invitus leges, dicito "ego mihi hoc contraxi," teque inter illos numera quos uxor magno ducta ambitu torquet, inter illos, quos divitiae per summum adquisitae sudorem male habent, inter illos quos honores nulla non arte atque opera petiti discruciant, et ceteros malorum suorum compotes. (*Ep.* 95.2–3)

For sometimes we seek with effort that which we should decline if offered voluntarily. Whether it is frivolity or servility (*vernilitas*), the habit is inevitably punished by too ready compliance. There are many things that we would have men think that we wish, but that we really do not wish. At a recitation, the speaker sometimes embarks on a vast work of research, written in very tiny script and very tightly rolled; after reading off a large portion, he says: "I shall stop if you wish"; and a shout arises: "Read on, read on!" from the lips of those who are anxious for the speaker to hold his tongue then and there. . . . But I will assert myself (*vindicabo*) mercilessly, and force (*inpingam*) a massive letter

on you, about which, should you read it unwillingly, say to yourself: "I brought (*contraxi*) this on myself," and you may class yourself among those men whose too ambitious wives drive them frantic, or those whom riches harass, earned by the extreme sweat of the brow, or those who are tortured by the honors they have sought by every sort of device and toil, and all others who are responsible for their own misfortunes.

Ironically, the two reading situations have something in common. Whereas the false intimacy of a recitation requires polite hypocrisy, in the context of a truly intimate correspondence, an addressee may confess distaste (the letter's writer may even anticipate it, as here), but, nonetheless, the obligation to read a friend's work remains. The passage includes some fiscal vocabulary (*impingam, contraxi*), as well as the verb *vindicare*, which resonates with Seneca's opening exhortation for Lucilius to free himself. In the first letter, it seemed that Lucilius stood to benefit himself without harming anyone else. In contrast, Seneca's disburdening in Letter 95 comes explicitly at Lucilius's expense. Seneca's metaphorical coercion reinforces the analogy between Lucilius and the audience burdened by their courtesy toward the *recitator*, but also complicates it. Seneca's vindication of himself involves an imposition on his friend that seems almost violent. But it is Lucilius who must accept or refuse the "massive letter" (*ingentem epistulam*) that Seneca has unloaded on him "mercilessly" (*omissa misericordia*). The art of self-vindication that both partners in this correspondence are learning requires each person to be responsible for himself. Seneca's characterization of the social habit of polite complaisance as a kind of homegrown servility (*vernilitas*) sharpens this point. A correspondence carried on voluntarily between two parties who claim to be motivated not by greed for gain or status but rather by a shared pursuit of the good life may nevertheless seem to place one partner at a disadvantage. If one correspondent's *vindicatio* depends on the *vernilitas* of the other, then an inequity that is supposedly endured for friendship's sake in fact reveals that the supposed friendship is not true friendship, but flattery.²⁹ Seneca's subtle distinction in Letter 95 between a voluntary favor done by a true friend and the imposition that a flatterer may permit but may also resent is illuminated by another passage in the letters, which also occurs in the context of what Lucilius may or may not owe to Seneca as a reader.

In Letter 45 Seneca responds to a request to send Lucilius his other, unspecified, presumably philosophical but nonepistolary, writings. Seneca avers that this request comes from Lucilius's kindness (*indulgentia*) rather than his good judgment (*iudicium*). He does not refuse Lucilius's request, but instructs him on how to read the works that, we may imagine, accompany the letter. As part



of this instruction, Seneca describes his own relationship to other thinkers. The terminology he uses is striking: "I have not enslaved myself to anyone. I bear the name of no man. I entrust much to the judgment of great men, and yet I claim something for my own." (Non enim me cuiquam emancipavi, nulus nomen fero; multum magnorum virorum iudicio credo, aliquid et meo vindico, 45.4.) Seneca compares the person who pledges his allegiance to an earlier person's exploration of philosophy to a slave, who would have the name of his owner branded on his person. Even though Seneca has celebrated in other letters the interdependence of his and Lucilius's journey toward realizing the philosophical life, here he stresses the autonomy that each person must continue to exercise, even in this common endeavor. In Letter 44 Seneca effortlessly shifts from the literal realm to the metaphorical when he admonishes Lucilius not to regard himself as an equestrian, his actual rank (44.2, 6), but, instead, "imagine that you are . . . a freedman, so that you alone are able to attain this: to become, among freeborn gentlemen, truly free." (Putaque te non equitem Romanum esse sed libertinum: potes hoc consequi, ut solus sis liber inter ingenuos, 44.6.)³⁰ Lucilius's progress in claiming self-possession may perhaps be gauged by the fact that in Letter 45 he has requested whole books from Seneca, rather than a mere daily allowance (*peculium*) as in Letter 12, or the resumption of maxims attached to each letter, as at Letter 33.1. Moreover, the next letter (46) finds Lucilius contributing his share to their exchange, having authored and sent Seneca an impressive work of his own.³¹

The Reader's Role

In Seneca's social economy, as in Cicero's, a favor granted requires a favor in return, although courtesy equally demands that all parties to the transaction deny the expectation of one. In Letter 81, which Seneca represents as a companion to his earlier treatise *De beneficiis* (81.3), he muses over the semantics of gift and counter-gift: "We do not say 'he repaid a benefit' or 'he discharged it.' We are in no way content with a word that applies properly to debt. But 'making a return' is giving something back to the person from whom you received something. This word conveys a voluntary return: the one who gives back answers to himself." (Non dicimus "reposuit beneficium" aut "solvit": nullum nobis placuit quod aeri alieno convenit verbum. Referre est ad eum a quo acceperis rem ferre. Haec vox significat voluntarium relationem: qui rettulit, ipse se appellavit, 81.9–10.)³² Further along in the letter, Seneca reiterates that, as with other virtues, generosity "is not practiced for a reward. The wages of acting honorably are to have done so." (Non enim exercentur ad praemium: recte facti fecisse merces est, 81.19.)³³ Of course, even when a counter-gift has been given

and accepted, the relationship between giver and receiver is not at an end. Their gift exchange is not concluded by the transaction, but instead is renewed. This “rule of the gift” may suggest an explanation of the curious fact that Seneca repeatedly suggests that he is in Lucilius’s debt, despite the fact that all the letters in the collection are written by Seneca. Lucilius’s silence and Seneca’s insistent claim to be himself indebted add up to a rhetorical stratagem. Seneca’s claims to indebtedness foster the expectation that this correspondence has two partners who both read letters and write them, alternating between the roles of writer and addressee. Seneca manages to create this expectation in spite of the fact that none of the letters that Lucilius supposedly would have written back survive.³⁴ According to this expectation of reciprocity, when Seneca offers “gifts” or “payments,” he gives them in return for those he receives from Lucilius. Seneca repeatedly invokes the conventional scenario of a back-and-forth exchange of correspondence, but the reader’s own experience, in which Lucilius’s replies are missing and his debt therefore unpaid, cannot be completely discounted. The impression of an exchange out of balance persists.

The frequent and varied use of financial metaphors to introduce the maxims in Letters 1 through 29 stresses the awkward lopsidedness of the correspondence. A reader who is sensitive to the obligation to reciprocate a gift for a gift will grow increasingly unsettled by the one-sidedness of the gift exchange portrayed in Seneca’s letters. Despite his polite protestations of indebtedness, Seneca is not being reciprocated for his own outlays of time and thought. If the proper return for one of Seneca’s letters to Lucilius is a letter written in return, then only Lucilius can reciprocate, and Seneca remains largely uncompensated. However, a reader may take on Lucilius’s debt by stepping into his place, the place of the aspiring Stoic, the partner in Seneca’s progress toward philosophical freedom. If the anonymous reader steps into the second person, becoming the “you” addressed by the letters, he or she may repay Seneca’s gift with interest, both by reading the letters responsively and by acting on them. However, this tactic is not without danger. Seneca was well aware that a thin line separates gratitude from resentment. Writing about this delicate balance in the negotiation of social favors, he remarks, “Small debt makes a debtor, great debt makes an enemy” (*leve aes alienum debitorem facit, grave inimicum*, *Ep.* 19.11). A reader who feels coerced to adopt a position of indebtedness may stop reading, rather than responding with gratitude. And yet the opportunity to feel gratitude is in itself a gift, a point that Seneca elaborates at some length in Letter 81: “[Being grateful] is a good for us. . . . There is no one who has not benefited himself when he benefits another person.” (*Nostrum enim hoc bonum est. . . . Nemo non, cum alteri prodest, sibi profuit*, 81.19.) He concludes that the primary cause for ingratitude is a person’s feeling inadequate to



express gratitude amply enough, a mistaken attitude he is at pains to correct: "Nothing is more honorable than a grateful heart. . . . Hold on to what you have received. I do not seek a return. I do not demand it. Let it be safe to have given a benefit." (*nihil esse grato animo honestius. . . . Tibi habe, quod accepisti; non repeto, non exigo: profuisse tutum sit*, 81.30, 32.) In the *De beneficiis*, Seneca writes that gratitude is the first recompense for a gift ("Qui grate beneficium accipit, primam eius pensionem solvit," *Ben.* 2.22). So Seneca's partner in correspondence may perhaps discharge his debt by gratefully receiving and reading a letter, rather than by writing back. Reading may in fact be as valuable a counter-gift as a letter written in reply, and reading is a counter-gift, unlike a letter addressed to Seneca, that readers after Lucilius can return.

Within the *Moral Epistles*, Seneca never directly solicits readers beyond Lucilius. At several points in the collection, however, he does betray an awareness of his larger audience.³⁵ In the eighth letter, he explains that the philosopher who retires from the world is neither selfish nor idle; although he lives in apparent seclusion, he is helping a great number of people as he communicates with himself, and with posterity (8.1, 6). Seneca's claim to an audience among posterity is connected to his redefinitions of wealth, ownership, and friendship. His redefinition of wealth at the close of Letter 4 explicitly rejects the social practices that are necessary for prosperity as it is usually understood. In Letter 19 he says that the worst misfortune of the busy man who is "besieged by his possessions" (*bonis suis obsessus*, 19.11) is to believe he is a friend of those who in fact cultivate him for his wealth. The pursuit of wealth or any sort of social or political distinction is a hindrance both to true friendship and to self-knowledge, which includes the understanding that true goods are not hoarded, displayed, sold, or traded, but freely available to all. That ideal of common possession should include the words of Seneca's correspondence with Lucilius, insofar as it contains truth. Seneca lays his own claim to the truth in Letter 12 ("Quod verum est meum est," 12.11), but it is not an exclusive claim. He closes Letter 33 with the assertion that despite all the thinkers who have gone before, leaving records of their wisdom, the truth remains open to everyone, and there is plenty of truth left for future generations to express ("Patet omnibus veritas; nondum est occupata; multum ex illa etiam futuris relictum est," 33.11). In Letter 45 he advises Lucilius to read his works as those of a person fiercely seeking truth, not as one who has found it.³⁶

The conclusion of Letter 33 reads like a challenge and an invitation to the anonymous reader to add to the common store of truth with contributions of his or her own. Of course, to have gotten this far, a reader has to have passed beyond the "little gifts" of the first twenty-nine letters, and to have kept on reading, motivated in part, perhaps, by the hope that the *sententiae* will resume.

The letter may be addressed to just those readers, although Lucilius stands in for them. Seneca begins by restating his correspondent's request: "You want me to include notable sayings of our leading thinkers in this letter, as I used to do." (*Desideras his quoque epistulis sicut prioribus adscribi aliquas voces nostrorum procerum*, 33.1.) Then he devotes the rest of the letter to explaining why he has abandoned the practice. Choice maxims culled from larger works are useful to the unpracticed mind that cannot comprehend more. But for his correspondent, who is no longer a novice, he recommends a different method of reading. If we depend on excerpts, we risk missing out on the assistance of equally important context.

Quare depone istam spem posse te summatim degustare ingenia maximorum virorum: tota tibi inspicienda sunt, tota tractanda. <Continuando> res geritur et per lineamenta sua ingenii opus nectitur, ex quo nihil subduci sine ruina potest. (*Ep.* 33.5)

Set aside the hope that you could digest the brilliance of the greatest men by skimming. You must thoroughly examine and treat their whole works. An idea is advanced and a work of genius is woven together line by line, and nothing can be plucked out from it without harm.

This advice may seem like a repudiation of the method of reading Seneca endorsed earlier, when he promised to send Lucilius selected books with important passages already marked, and recommended that each day he pick a single thought to digest (*Ep.* 6.5, 2.4). Rather, in keeping with his dramatization of Lucilius's philosophical progress, Seneca is emphasizing a different part of the same ongoing process of active, responsive reading. In the earlier letter he stressed reading the best authors, as opposed to many authors. The practice of constantly reading and rereading the classics (*probatos*) is consistent both with picking out notable phrases and passages and with understanding the whole fabric of a work. Different phrases, different figures of speech, will leap out at each reader at different times, but gradually, with practice, he or she will see how they make sense together, and make sense of each other.³⁷ Significantly, Seneca recommends the switch from selective reading that picks out *sententiae* to attentive reading of whole texts only after he has written three books of *Moral Epistles*, so providing his reader with a reasonably lengthy text to now re-read as one deliberately interwoven fabric.³⁸ At the same time that the mature reader begins to comprehend the entirety of great works, he will also begin to write or speak *sententiae* of his own, rather than clinging to those of others ("Dicat ista, non teneat," 33.7). Only then will he or she be able to contribute



something to posterity's common store.³⁹ By this kind of active reflection, Seneca's reader may perpetuate an exchange of gifts, accepting the obligation of interpretation in return for the gift of Seneca's words and example.

In the first three books of the *Moral Epistles*, Seneca constructs the persona of his philosophical and epistolary partner Lucilius, and invites the reader to step into his place. At the same time, he stakes a claim to the terminology of Roman social practices, including epistolary gift exchange, and transforms it to serve his own purposes. Having established this figurative matrix, he continues to make use of it throughout the collection. The metaphorical and fictional *commercium epistularum* of Seneca's letters to Lucilius provides a paradoxically public arena for their author to take up the work of constructing a correspondence, a selfhood, and an *amicitia* that remain thoroughly Roman, even as he rejects the traditional social practices whose imagery and vocabulary he reclaims.⁴⁰

6



REHABILITATING FRIENDSHIP

Books 1 through 3 of the *Moral Epistles* reclaim a vivid sense for a figurative vocabulary that had grown pale with use. They construct the character of Lucilius, they establish Lucilius and Seneca's relationship as *amicitia*, and they invite the reader to join in the exchange. The definition of friend (*amicus*) and the practice of friendship (*amicitia*) are treated in several early letters, and the importance of friendship to the collection is firmly established. However, at the midpoint of the fourth book of letters, in Letter 35, Seneca makes a return to the topic of friendship that further complicates its definition and threatens the validity of philosophical friendship as it has been practiced through the correspondence thus far. He never repudiates the exercise of friendship as carried out through the *Moral Epistles*, but a number of passages from the middle of the collection make clear the paradoxical nature of the enterprise.

This chapter focuses first on the revised definition of friends and friendship that comes from a trio of letters in Book 1 (3, 6, 9), then turns to Letter 19, which explicitly connects friendship with the need for a person who aspires to wisdom to withdraw from public life.¹ In the first set of letters, Seneca more or less directly raises a variety of questions about friends and friendship. How should we select our friends, and how should we treat them? Is having one or more friends desirable, or even necessary? How many friends should we have? From the answers to these questions, some implicit and some overt, a rough checklist for making and keeping friends and a guide to recognizing true friendship start to emerge. Letter 19 then complicates the endeavor of putting this new form of friendship into practice by urging on Lucilius an apparent



paradox. Seneca presses his friend to reject the world of social intercourse and success achieved through a network of friendships as commonly understood, in favor of a rigorously observed independence of mind and values, to be practiced in relative seclusion. At the same time, he exhorts him to commit, in his retirement from the world, to a new version of friendship that is intimately, intensely, interdependent. In these letters, Seneca creates a version of friendship that makes its epistolary aspect—an important part of Roman friendship at least from Cicero's time—into its chief component and sufficient medium. At the same time, he strives to make a friendship that is compatible with his ethical program, as traditional Roman *amicitia* was not. Seneca refines the idea of using a letter to a friend as mirror and measuring rod, an instrument to craft and judge the self. Yet all the while, the letters intermittently raise the question of whether friendship between imperfect individuals is possible, and, if possible, whether it can progress and endure. Moreover, passages within the letters tease the reader with intimations that the epistolary friendship that the collection exemplifies and the two individuals it portrays are more or less beneficial fictions, constructed from words and sustained by the reader's credulity.

Friendship is a proper concern for Seneca's *Moral Epistles* with respect to both the letters' content and their form. The nature and value of friendship were a preoccupation of ancient ethics from Socrates onward.² The Epicureans were particularly emphatic about the importance of friendship to the good life, and Epicurus also used letters as a means of philosophical instruction.³ Yet the conventional Roman idea and practice of *amicitia* remains the standard from which Seneca departs. His unexpectedly sympathetic reception of the Epicurean view that friendship is based in utility, which the Stoics rejected, may stem from the unavowed but undeniably pragmatic dimension of traditional Roman *amicitia*.⁴ By transferring the instrumental aspect of Roman friendship from the social to the philosophical sphere, Seneca manages to preserve his commitment to Stoic doctrine, whose emphasis on self-sufficiency tended to downplay the importance of friendship, while adopting a playfully ironic, quasi-Epicurean, and thoroughly Roman approach to the topic.

In Ciceronian and post-republican Rome, more or less euphemistic and utilitarian versions of friendship provided important avenues for social negotiations between individuals, courts, and polities. Friendship continued as a topic for discussion in Roman philosophy; in Roman life, it continued as a crucial means of social organization and action. The scope of relationships that were called *amicitia* by their participants was broad, but the ancient authors distinguish—albeit often disingenuously—between *amicitia* relationships that were continuously under negotiation as both partners worked for their own social, political, and financial self-interest and, on the other hand, ideal friendship,

inspired and sustained by mutually reinforcing aspiration toward a shared notion of the good life.⁵ In the *De amicitia*, Cicero describes this true friendship, *vera amicitia*, in which friends are candid critics and inspirational figures whose conversation and example help their friends to become better men. He condemns the worldly version as friendship in name only (*Amic.* 46, 51). Yet, as we have seen in previous chapters, Cicero's rhetorical tactics in the *Ad familiares* often depend on confounding the two types of friendship, or on representing a friendship grounded in social utility as though it were based on simple affection and shared intellectual pursuits.⁶

If Seneca's personal correspondence had been preserved, a similar flexibility might also be visible in his oeuvre. In the extant corpus, his fragmentary work *Quomodo amicitia continenda sit* marks a distinction between the socially expedient category of friends and rarer genuine friendship. The *Moral Epistles* altogether reject conventional *amicitia*—that is, the establishment and use of the network of overlapping business, political, social, and affective relationships through which Roman aristocrats were accustomed to conduct conventionally successful lives—and all its practices besides. By using correspondence, a traditional instrument of social negotiation, to refashion friendship as a philosophical project, Seneca tacitly declares that the letter, too, is now an entirely philosophical instrument, social currency no longer. Of course, precisely because of the importance of correspondence within conventional *amicitia*, exquisitely modeled for Seneca and his contemporaries by Cicero's letters, using a letter collection to define and illustrate this new form of ideal friendship is a paradoxical maneuver in itself. Many passages in the letters suggest that Seneca enjoyed, and even amplified, this irony of clashing form and function.

Making Friends

Seneca's preservation of the rhetorical forms of traditional *amicitia* correspondence is exemplified by his frequent mention in the *Moral Epistles* of third parties—that is, persons other than the letter's writer and addressee. Cicero articulates a model for ideal friendship in which there are two partners, acting as models and mirrors for one another.⁷ Yet in the actual *amicitia* relationships documented by Cicero's letters, there are more often three participants than two, a result of the kind of relationship, based on the carefully euphemized exchange of mutual benefit, that those letters enact. These third parties include personified texts, human protégés, and other objects of shared concern, such as freedmen and children. Moreover, because Cicero's letters are displays or performances of friendship, as well as vehicles for news, requests, thanks,



consolation, and the like, they assume an audience. At a bare minimum, members of the households of sender and receiver would witness their dispatch and arrival.

Seneca portrays his relationship with Lucilius as based on shared ideals and their mutual pursuit of philosophy. Cicero's letters to Atticus show that a friendship could be justified on intellectual grounds and yet encompass shared social bonds and shared political and financial interests.⁸ Seneca, however, is broadly critical in the *Moral Epistles* of friendships that involve material interests in any shape or form. Furthermore, he urges Lucilius to withdraw as completely as he can from the world of social and financial negotiation. Given this attitude, we might expect Seneca's letters to avoid the third persons who crop up so often in Ciceronian correspondence. But, in fact, Seneca's letters include many third persons, and they often play a mediating role similar to that of their counterparts in Cicero's letters. By artful contrast, they are made to draw attention to the similarity and shared goals of Seneca and Lucilius. That is, these third persons are represented as the odd man out, drawing the two correspondents more closely together. They appear most frequently as exemplars of behavior that Lucilius and Seneca should praise, blame, imitate, or avoid. The presence of a third participant in these letters marks a relationship, however distant, to the dynamics of Cicero's familiar correspondence. But the appearance of third persons in the *Moral Epistles* acts to subvert epistolary expectations based on Cicero. Rather than simply mimicking or emulating Ciceronian precedent, Seneca's renditions of triangularity in friendship and letters are designed to undermine it.

For an example, we can look to Seneca's attitude toward an anonymous "friend" of Lucilius whom he mentions at the outset of Letter 3. At the opening of the letter, Seneca queries Lucilius's overly casual application of the word *amicus*, thus paving the way for his first attempt at defining an alternative version of friendship: "You have handed over letters to be carried to me, as you write, by your friend; next you warn me not to share everything about you with him, since even you yourself are not accustomed to do that: thus in the same letter you both say and deny that he is your friend." (*Epistulas ad me perferendas tradidisti, ut scribis, amico tuo; deinde admones me ne omnia cum eo ad te pertinentia communicem, quia non soleas ne ipse quidem id facere: ita eadem epistula illum et dixisti amicum et negasti*, 3.1.)

The first word of the letter emphasizes the form taken by Seneca and Lucilius's conversation. A reader thus alerted to the specifically epistolary qualities of the text will notice that Seneca uses a convention familiar from Cicero's letters, particularly his letters of recommendation, to open this letter. Namely, Seneca immediately introduces all three participants in the epistolary exchange.

Within the first line, we have encountered Seneca, Lucilius, and Lucilius's friend the messenger. However, in contrast to Cicero's practice, not one of the three participants in the correspondence is named. Certainly, the importance of a Ciceronian protégé is subordinated to the relationship he furthers between the two correspondents, but his name and his social position do matter. The anonymity of all three members of the Senecan triangle suggests that this letter is not concerned with social negotiation, but with some other level or version of reality (one less concerned with particularity and more prone to generalization, perhaps). This impression is confirmed when, almost as soon as the third partner is introduced, Seneca calls his status into question by way of an inconsistency that he imputes to Lucilius, in the same letter both overtly affirming and yet implicitly denying that the letter-bearer is his friend. Seneca goes on to explain that if Lucilius meant "friend" as a socially expedient euphemism, "in the way that we call all candidates for office 'good men'" (*si . . . sic illum amicum vocasti quomodo omnes candidatos "bonos viros" dicimus*, 3.1), then his request for Seneca's discretion would make sense.⁹ If, however, Lucilius meant to call this man his friend in earnest, but does not trust him fully, he has made a grave mistake, revealing that he does not understand what true friendship is.¹⁰ Seneca evokes both traditional and ideal friendship and designates the former false and the latter real.

The third person immediately introduced into Letter 3 appears mainly as a motive or premise, the impetus and justification for a continuing conversation between two friends that largely excludes him, although he gives it occasion and point. The marked neglect of this third person, despite the apparent prominence suggested by his introduction within the first line of the letter, actually sharpens the resemblance of this Senecan letter to a Ciceronian recommendation. In those letters, the third partner, who is the letter's ostensible subject—the protégé of the letter's author and the anticipated beneficiary of the letter's recipient—occupies a similar position. The two partners in correspondence sustain and develop their relationship through discussion of the third partner's merit and favors bestowed or to be bestowed on him. In its introduction and immediate dismissal of Lucilius's friend, Seneca's letter follows the pattern of a Ciceronian letter of recommendation, in which a favor for a friend, solicited or acknowledged, often gives a basis for the exchange of correspondence, but the protégé is fully subordinate to the relationship between the letter's writer and recipient. The recipient of the favor mediates the relationship between reader and writer. Seneca mimics this technique of social negotiation, but he departs from Ciceronian precedent by using his mention of the letter-bearer to introduce the content of Letter 3, which turns out to be a critique of traditional Roman friendship.



Seneca instructs Lucilius in the selection of a true friend, then on how to treat him. Then he poses a question that threatens to undermine the practice of friendship altogether:

Tu vero omnia cum amico delibera, sed de ipso prius: post amicitiam credendum est, ante amicitiam iudicandum. . . . Diu cogita an tibi in amicitiam aliquis recipiendus sit. Cum placuerit fieri, toto illum pectore admitte; tam audaciter cum illo loquere quam tecum. . . . cum amico omnes curas, omnes cogitationes tuas misce. . . . Quid est quare ego ulla verba coram amico meo retraham? quid est quare me coram illo non putem solum? (*Ep.* 3.2–3)

Think over everything with your friend, but first deliberate about him: after friendship, he must be trusted; before friendship, he must be judged. . . . Consider for a long while whether someone ought to be accepted into your friendship; when you have decided to become friends, welcome him with your whole heart—speak as boldly with him as with yourself. . . . Mingle all your concerns and all your thoughts with your friend. . . . What reason is there that I should hold back any words in the presence of a friend? What reason is there for me not to think myself alone when in his presence?

The proper selection of a friend is very exacting, it seems, and unlikely to yield many adequate candidates. At this point, Seneca's reader might be forgiven for thinking that if the aim is to find a companion whose company leaves us feeling as uninhibited as if we were enjoying complete privacy, then perhaps we should forgo the selection process altogether and learn to cherish solitude, confiding only in ourselves.

The notion of becoming a friend to oneself resurfaces in Letter 6, which endorses that idea in its conclusion through a quotation from the Stoic thinker Hecato: "You ask what I have accomplished? I have begun to be my own friend." (*Quaeris . . . quid profecerim? amicus esse mihi coepi*, 6.7.) But Letter 6 gives no indication that friendship with oneself should be exclusive, nor that it should make friendship with others undesirable. On the contrary, the final sentence of Letter 6 declares, "Know that this man [the man who is a friend to himself] is a friend to everyone." (*Scito esse hunc amicum omnibus*, 6.7.) More explanation of what it might mean to be a friend to everyone, or who might achieve such a friendship, is left unsaid within this letter, although by implication Seneca returns to it in discussing the wise person's friendships in Letter 9. On the other hand, the idea of becoming a friend to oneself is presaged in the opening lines of Letter 6, which suggest that Seneca has already managed an internal division of the self into observed and observing parts:¹¹

Intellego, Lucili, non emendari me tantum sed transfigurari; nec hoc promitto iam aut spero, nihil in me superesse quod mutandum sit. Quidni multa habeam quae debeant colligi, quae extenuari, quae attolli? Et hoc ipsum argumentum est in melius translatis animi, quod vitia sua quae adhuc ignorabat videt; quibusdam aegris gratulatio fit cum ipsi aegros se esse senserunt. (*Ep.* 6.1)

I understand, Lucilius, that I am not only improved but also transformed. But I do not yet promise or even hope that nothing remains in me that must be changed. Certainly I have many faults that should be gathered, reduced, and removed. Yet this itself is proof of a mind making progress—namely, that it sees the vices it was ignorant of before; congratulations are in order for certain ailing people when they realize they are ill.

The self-criticism that Seneca describes is analogous to the interaction of true friends depicted in Letter 3.¹² There, Seneca's initial reason for calling Lucilius's use of the term *amicus* into question is the request that Seneca *not* share with the supposed friend everything to do with Lucilius (*admones me ne omnia cum eo ad te pertinentia communicem*, 3.1). But this kind of uncensored, mutual evaluation and review is exactly what conversation between friends should consist of, according to Seneca. In Letter 6, he continues,

Cuperem itaque tecum communicare tam subitam mutationem mei; tunc amicitiae nostrae certiore fiduciam habere coepissem, illius verae quam non spes, non timor, non utilitatis suae cura divellit, illius cum qua homines moriuntur, pro qua moriuntur. (*Ep.* 6.2)¹³

Thus have I been wishing to share with you my sudden change; then I would begin to have a surer trust in our friendship—namely, that it is of the true sort which neither hope, nor fear, nor care for one's own self-interest may destroy, but the sort with which men die, on behalf of which they die.

Seneca is eager, even obligated, to share his transformation with Lucilius because the trust (*fiducia*) that cements their relationship has as its foundation their joint progress toward the truth and their common possession of it. Subsequent sections remind us that friends possess all things in common (“*ipsos [amicos] omnia habere communia*,” 6.3), and assert that no possession is pleasurable without someone to share it (“*nullius boni sine socio iucunda possessio est*,” 6.4). Accordingly, just as Seneca must share his progress with his friend, and in some sense his progress actually belongs to Lucilius, the converse is also true. This mutuality explains the opening of Letter 5, which expresses Seneca's



investment in Lucilius's progress but does not explain it: "That you tenaciously keep on and with all other pursuits laid aside you go after this one thing, that every day you make yourself better, I both approve and I rejoice, and I not only exhort you to keep on, but I demand it." (*Quod pertinaciter studes et omnibus omissis hoc unum agis, ut te meliorem cotidie facias, et probo et gaudeo, nec tantum hortor ut perseveres sed etiam rogo*, 5.1.) Letter 6 thus begins to respond to a question that the opening of Letter 5 might provoke a reader to ask, but that the text does not raise—namely, why Seneca demands that Lucilius devote himself to his own self-improvement.¹⁴ The reasoning behind Seneca's insistent concern for Lucilius's progress, and the explanation for why his investment in Lucilius's transformation ought not be interpreted cynically as Seneca looking chiefly after his *own* self-interest, accumulates gradually as the letters continue, in a subtle exposition of Senecan friendship that grows fuller, more pointed, and more complex as Seneca adds to it.

By addressing Lucilius by name at the outset of Letter 6 (in contrast to the unnamed "you" in Letters 3 and 5), Seneca suggests that sharing one's transformation with a particular individual is part of the process of becoming a friend to oneself (and thus to all). A comparison with Letter 27 is constructive. That letter, near the end of Book 3, begins with a fuller evocation of the medical metaphor that Seneca used more briefly in Letter 6. The letter opens with an exclamation from Lucilius: "You advise me? Have you already advised yourself, have you already emended yourself?" ("Tu me," inquis, "mones? iam enim te ipse monuisti, iam correxisti?" 27.1). Seneca conciliates his friend by confessing that he addresses Lucilius as though he were talking to himself. Within a few lines, he does so.

Non sum tam inprobus ut curationes aeger obeam, sed, tamquam in eodem valetudinario iaceam, de communi tecum malo conloquor et remedia communico. Sic itaque me audi tamquam mecum loquar; in secretum te meum admitto et te adhibito mecum exigo. Clamo mihi ipse . . . (*Ep.* 27.1)

I am not so wicked as to undertake doctoring while I myself am sick, but just as though I lie in the same infirmary, I share the disease and talk with you about a shared remedy. In secret, I confess myself to you and using you as my pretext, I examine myself. I cry out to myself . . .

Read in isolation, this passage from Letter 27 might suggest that observing the faults of a friend and encouraging him—that is, the externalized version of the internal process Seneca suggests in Letter 6—will precede observing and exhorting oneself, and perhaps even that it provides training for the

internalized practice. The sequence of the letters argues against this interpretation, however. Seneca is able in the earlier letter to examine and criticize himself without explicitly visualizing a fellow sufferer. Friendship between two like minds is not a preliminary step toward self-sufficient isolation, but an ongoing part of the art of living that both the wise man and ordinary agents practice. Inner dialogue does not replace but rather complements outer dialogue.¹⁵

On the other hand, Seneca's reply to the initial objection he imagines Lucilius to make in Letter 27 is notable not only for portraying the intimacy of the dialogue in which the two are engaged, but also for the interiority of the form it takes. With *tamquam*, in the letter's second sentence, Seneca emphasizes that the whole scenario is imagined. *Te adhibito* ("with you as pretext") states outright that Lucilius's presence has been imagined to assist in Seneca's scrutiny of himself. So in spite of the apparent affirmations of Letters 5 and 6, Letter 27 complicates the role Seneca envisions real, individual friends playing in the daily practices of an aspiring philosopher.¹⁶ Letter 6 also plays a part in this complication. Seneca remarks that many men lack not a friend, but true friendship ("Multos tibi dabo qui non amico sed amicitia caruerint: hoc non potest accidere cum animos in societatem honesta cupiendi par voluntas trahit," 6.3). The assertion that "an equal will for desiring what is honorable" will lead men into the "fellowship of minds" that constitutes true friendship suggests an affirmative response to a question suggested but left unasked by Letter 3. That is, when a person is able to confide completely in himself, he will nevertheless still have friends. This formulation of the basis of friendship does not allow for the possibility that an individual might fail in finding others equally committed to the pursuit of virtue ("honesta cupiendi par voluntas"), but if that scenario were to come to pass, presumably the person who already possessed correct beliefs about friendship would lack not friendship, but merely friends. In Letter 9 Seneca returns to the question of who our friends should be and whether they are in all cases desirable with reference to the Stoic sage. Does the wise person, who is perfect in virtue and so communes perfectly with himself, have friends? Seneca answers that he will.

Illud nobis et illis commune est, sapientem se ipso esse contentum. Sed tamen et amicum habere vult et vicinum et contubernalem, quamvis sibi ipse sufficiat. Vide quam sit se contentus: aliquando sui parte contentus est. Si illi manum aut morbus aut hostis exciderit, si quis oculum vel oculos casus excusserit, reliquiae illi suae satisfaciunt et erit inminuto corpore et amputato tam laetus quam [in] integro fuit; sed <si> quae sibi desunt non desiderat, non deesse mavult. (*Ep.* 9:3–4)



We [the Stoics] have this position in common with them [the Epicureans]: the wise man is self-sufficient. Nevertheless, he wishes to possess a neighbor and a fellow soldier, even though he is content as companion for himself. Look how he suffices for himself—sometimes he is content even with a part of himself. If disease or an enemy should cut off his hand, if some misfortune should knock out his eye or eyes, his remaining parts will be enough for him, and when his body has been impaired and amputated, he will be as happy as when it was whole. If he lacks them he does not miss them, yet he prefers not to lack them.

This is a dramatic analogy, as Margaret Graver notes: “The relation of the wise person to friends . . . is as intimate as one’s attachment to one’s own body.”¹⁷ And yet the wise man is undiminished by the loss of a friend. This expression of the wise man’s self-sufficiency may relate to an argument that is also suggested by Seneca’s observation in Letter 6 that “many men lack not friends, but friendship.” That is, the wise person may value friendship itself—the mutual regard arising from a community of like minds—rather than any individual friend. Graver discerns an additional defense for the claim that self-sufficiency is compatible with friendship: “The value of the commonality between friends is in its harmonious nature, and this is not dependent on numbers or diminished by the removal of one person.”¹⁸ Graver sees both of these defenses operating in Letter 9. The first lies in the analogy to the loss of a hand or an eye: as a body may remain a harmonious whole even after the loss of one or more members, so too does a society of friends. The second defense lies in an analogy to the practice of a master sculptor, Phidias:

Ita sapiens se contentus est, non ut velit esse sine amico sed ut possit; et hoc quod dico “possit” tale est: amissum aequo animo fert. Sine amico quidem numquam erit: in sua potestate habet quam cito reparat. Quomodo si perdidit Phidias statuem protinus alteram faciet, sic hic faciendarum amicitiarum artifex substituet alium in locum amissi. (Ep. 9.5)

The wise man is sufficient unto himself to the extent that, although he does not wish to be without a friend, he can be, and when I say, “He can,” I mean this: that he bears the loss of a friend with tranquility. Indeed, he will never be without a friend, for it is within his capacity to quickly make good the loss. In the way that if Phidias should lose a statue, he will immediately make another, just so he [the wise man], an artist in making friendships, will put another in place of the lost one.

Seneca’s assertion that the wise man’s perfect skill in making friends will keep him well supplied belies a chief requirement for Roman friendship, even

heavily euphemized friendship between partners of unequal status: friendship is reciprocal. It requires appropriate actions in turn by both, or all, participants. Seneca's analogy with Phidias seems to suggest, by contrast, a completely asymmetric model for friendship in which all agency belongs to the wise man, while his friend is merely the passive recipient of his regard.¹⁹ Such a model does not correspond to any recognizable pattern of *amicitia*, including the relationship between Seneca and Lucilius, or his stand-in, the reader.²⁰ Concentrating on the active/passive asymmetry implied by the comparison with Phidias is not necessarily a misreading of the analogy—surely the wise man's friendships will be singular in every way—but more to the point for our exploration of Senecan friendship is another asymmetry that the analogy illustrates: that is, the singularity of the wise man versus the endless supply of potential friends available to him. Given the difficult selection process for acquiring friends described in Letter 3, how can there be an unlimited number of potential friends for anyone? Here again, the answer lies in the exceptional status of the wise person. Whereas ordinary people must be very careful that our friends, who serve as sounding board and mirror, do not make us worse, the wise man has no secrets to hide and is invulnerable to the faults of others, and so the arduous selection process described in Letter 3 will not be difficult for him. Thus, the person mentioned at the end of Letter 6 who is a friend to himself, and thus a friend to all, is none other than the sage.²¹

Finally, Letter 19 advises Lucilius on how he should transform his daily life to bring it into accord with his revised version of friendship. In this letter, we see Seneca gently rehabilitating the idea of something close to a utilitarian basis for friendship, an idea that was traditionally associated with Epicurean friendship and rejected by the Stoics. In the first section of Letter 19, Seneca playfully suggests an identity of interest between himself and Lucilius. In the remainder of the letter, more seriously and subtly, he contends that an inadequate understanding of utility as material self-interest is an impediment to making right choices, whereas making right choices will do away with the possibility of misunderstanding utility as material self-interest. In addition, we see again in this letter how Seneca mimics the rhetoric of Ciceronian familiar letters to critique the aims for which those letters were designed.

The letter opens with a request, as Cicero's letters of recommendation do. But unlike a typical Ciceronian recommendation, which sets forth all the participants in the transaction and how they are already related to one another at the outset, the opening of this letter mentions only two persons, Seneca and Lucilius. To provide a third person, however, Seneca borrows another technique found in Cicero's letters.²² He personifies the letters (*epistulae*) of Lucilius. Separated from Lucilius, they become a third participant in the epistolary



transaction. Lucilius becomes their protégé, and the letters become his guarantor. They do not merely “promise” (*promittunt*) but even “solemnly swear” (*spondent*). His present and future actions are the subject of his letters’ past and present pledge. Lucilius has yet to live up to what his words promise he will become, but he is certainly—so says Seneca—going to do so:²³ “I rejoice whenever I receive your letters. For they fill me with hope, and already they do not make mere promises about you; they make vows. Continue this way, I beg and beseech you. For what better request could I make of a friend than what I will request for his sake?” (*Exulto quotiens epistulas tuas accipio; implem enim me bona spe, et iam non promittunt de te sed spondent. Ita fac, oro atque obsecro—quid enim habeo melius quod amicum rogem quam quod pro ipso rogaturus sum?* 19.1.)

Moreover, in the opening sentence, Seneca positions himself as the recipient of a gift. The letters he is delighted to receive are not accompanied by a promising protégé in the flesh, however, as would often be the case with a Ciceronian recommendation. Instead, they make solemn vows (“non promittunt de te sed spondent”).²⁴ Although the personification of Lucilius’s letters accomplished by these verbs grants them urgency and even agency, the letters can only make vows, not fulfill them. And so, his appetite whetted by letters, in the third sentence Seneca becomes a petitioner (“oro atque obsecro”), eager to benefit from the granting of his plea.²⁵ In the fourth sentence, he at one stroke reverses the two positions and occupies them both, along with Lucilius—not only is he at once the petitioner for and the recipient of a benefit, but so, potentially, is his friend, who will benefit equally (or more) when he does as his friend asks.²⁶ The rhetorical dexterity of this formulation is reminiscent of Ciceronian euphemism. However, a letter of recommendation from Cicero usually asks for a discreetly nonspecific benefit to be conferred on its bearer. Sender, receiver, and protégé all know what is expected: either a real position or a sinecure, but in either case a step up in the world that will confer increased status on the protégé now and, assuming all goes well, eventually on all three participants in the exchange. In contrast, Seneca’s request to Lucilius is direct and specific: “If you are able, lead yourself away from worldly business; if that is difficult, tear yourself away.” (*si potes, subduc te istis occupationibus; si minus, eripe*, 19.1.)

Why Retire? Evaluation and Revelation

After an opening that evokes Ciceronian epistolary practice, and particularly the rhetoric of recommendation, Seneca justifies and refines his blunt request—“si potes, subduc te . . . si minus, eripe.” He does not urge Lucilius

to adopt an ostentatious seclusion. He rejects the eccentricity of utter solitude, alluding to a cartoon philosopher who absconds to a cave, declaring his fellow men mad (*Ep.* 19.2). Nor does this letter draw a contrast between friendship in the conventional sense and the true friendship of like minds in common pursuit of the good. Instead, Seneca gently nudges his addressee toward retirement by commenting on the irreversible renown that his talents have already won. Withdrawal from the world can threaten neither his accomplishments nor the illustrious friendships (“*clarae et nobiles amicitiae*,” 19.3) he already has. Seneca leaves unspoken the possibility that these friendships, gained through public successes, may not be as truly noble as they appear. In the next paragraph, though, he warns Lucilius about the corrupting effects of continued ambition and success, and his vivid evocation of morning callers as legacy hunters camping out on the doorsteps of the rich (as cartoonish a picture as the philosopher in the cave) will prompt an attentive reader to reconsider the value of his own friendships with eminent men.

Rather than retreating entirely from society, Seneca recommends associating with companions who have been carefully selected. For a figurative payment to close the letter, he takes a passage from Epicurus: “[He] says, ‘You must carefully scrutinize with whom you eat and drink, rather than what you eat and drink, for eating meat without a friend is the life of a lion or a wolf.’ You will not be able to discriminate this way unless you retire.” (“*Ante*” inquit “*circumspiciendum est cum quibus edas et bibas quam quid edas et bibas; nam sine amico visceratio leonis ac lupi vita est.*” Hoc non continget tibi nisi secesseris, 19.10.)²⁷ Withdrawal from public life is a means of securing the independence that enables a man to select his friends on the basis of their true worth as companions, rather than by calculating obligation and advantage. Retirement will grant Lucilius freedom from the social, political, or economic negotiations necessitated by living in the public eye. “Otherwise,” the sentence continues, “you will have dinner guests whom your social secretary admits from the crowd of morning callers; moreover, he errs who seeks a friend in the atrium, and certifies him at a dinner party” (*alioquin habebis convivas quos ex turba salutantium nomenclator digesserit; errat autem qui amicum in atrio quaerit, in convivio probat*, 19.11). Seneca’s mention of the *nomenclator*, a slave whose job was specifically to mediate between the host and his guests, is significant. By deciding who gets access to his master’s presence and table, the *nomenclator* preempts the task of right choice that is central to the Stoic art of living.²⁸ In this way, the *nomenclator*’s mediation inevitably subverts the freedom of his master. For a man engaged in public life, whose time and energy are continuously in demand, some kind of social filter might well be necessary. In



retirement, however, the act of choosing friends can be done personally, as it ought. Lucilius may thus regain control over an aspect of his life that an ambitious career has subverted.

The recommendation to remove the nomenclator is an excellent demonstration of how Seneca transmutes acceptable social practices into philosophy lessons. Removing the third participant in a social practice—the figure that mediates between two aristocrats—also resonates as an analogue to the making metaphorical of correspondence. Whereas in a real Roman correspondence, both partners are dependent on the letter-carrier (often, like the nomenclator, a slave or freedman), whose participation in the exchange is critical to the performance of their relationship, in the *Moral Epistles* the third participant in correspondence is mentioned only as a device to recall the rhetorical norms of Ciceronian exchange, as in Letter 19, or to motivate the contents of the letter, as in Letter 3. As a rule, people do not pass between Lucilius and Seneca, whether as protégés or dependents, and usually, the letter-carrier simply goes unmentioned. His absence, and that of other potential beneficiaries of or witnesses to Lucilius and Seneca's friendship, marks the disengagement of these letters from the gift exchange that Cicero and his friends accomplished by means of correspondence.²⁹

The final sections of Letter 19 also stress the importance of choosing rightly and suggest that material wealth confuses the ability to evaluate people, situations, and possessions. A man "seized" (*occupatus*) and "besieged" (*obsessus*) by his possessions cannot distinguish between true friends and opportunists. He inadvertently works against his own interests because he cannot calculate accurately what to give in order to nurture friendships rather than inspiring resentment, nor can he decide rightly to whom he should give it.

Nullum habet maius malum occupatus homo et bonis suis obsessus quam quod amicos sibi putat quibus ipse non est, quod beneficia sua efficacia iudicat ad conciliandos amicos, cum quidam quo plus debent magis oderint: leve aes alienum debitorem facit, grave inimicum. "Quid ergo? beneficia non parant amicitias?" Parant, si accepturos licuit eligere, si conlocata, non sparsa sunt. Itaque dum incipis esse mentis tuae, interim hoc consilio sapientium utere, ut magis ad rem existimes pertinere quis quam quid acceperit. (*Ep.* 19.11–12)

The man held hostage by his possessions has no greater misfortune than the fact that he sees as his "friends" people to whom he himself is not a friend, because he thinks his favors are useful for getting friends, though, as for certain recipients, the more they owe, the more they hate him. A small debt makes someone a debtor, but a great debt makes an enemy. "But why? Don't favors make friendships?" They do, if one can choose who will accept them, and if they

are carefully placed, not scattered. And so, although you are starting to think for yourself, for now use this advice from wise men: consider that it matters more who receives, than what he receives.

Seneca does not want Lucilius to throw off all obligations and friendships, but rather to revise his idea of success, to abandon the pursuit of accomplishments measured by others in favor of those that are reckoned up in one's own mind, and to commit only to friendships aimed at mutual progress toward philosophical perfection.

When Seneca invokes the self-sufficient wise man in Letter 9 in order to promote his kind of philosophical friendship, he also suggests a far-reaching conclusion. Recall Seneca's instructions in Letter 3: "Indeed, may you live in such a manner that you may entrust to yourself nothing that you would not also be able to entrust to your enemy" (*Tu quidem ita vive ut nihil tibi committas nisi quod committere etiam inimico tuo possis*, 3.3). The closer Seneca comes to his ideal state of wisdom, happiness, virtue, the more transparently will he live, and the less protective of his innermost thoughts will he be.³⁰ In his continual progress toward virtue, the closer he comes to attaining it, the closer all of Seneca's letters will be to open letters. Even if formally addressed to Lucilius, they will be equally directed toward and will potentially communicate equally well to any reader, since what is true is a universally shared possession. The unsettling corollary is that if the aspiring wise man will live in such a way that he can reveal any part of his thoughts or life to anyone, then even though we are not Seneca's friends, we could just as well be. As Seneca approaches wisdom, the specific identity of Lucilius as friend and addressee will become superfluous.³¹

True Friends, with Benefits

Seneca rejects ordinary friendship based on mutually beneficial, euphemized gift exchange. But by using letters to articulate this rejection and to suggest an alternative way of life, he implicitly makes the claim that being an aspiring wise man and at the same time remaining a Roman aristocrat are not incompatible pursuits. The same means, the letters to Lucilius, serve two apparently contradictory ends, one conventional and one philosophical. If Seneca follows his own advice for how to live, and how to treat a friend, he will end up revealing himself totally to all of us. As long as he lives virtuously, this self-revelation is an embrace of the maxim "friends hold all things in common," as much as it is self-exposure. At the same time, the publication of these letters fulfills the traditional aim of every Roman aristocrat: to achieve immortal glory. Seneca



burnishes his reputation and preserves his name, but he also preserves his credibility as a Stoic. By co-opting correspondence for self-examination and philosophical dialectic, Seneca can plausibly represent his epistolary project and his friendship with Lucilius as detached from any interest in social advantage and fame. The letters to Lucilius may happen to secure these results, but they are not written for the sake of renown, nor is Lucilius cultivated as a conventional protégé: this epistolary friendship is pursued for its own sake. Yet Seneca's manipulation of friendly correspondence yields results that are as useful for his own progress as they are for that of Lucilius. We may be reminded of Cicero's succinct formulation explaining how advantages tend to come from friends, despite his insistence that true friendship cannot be contracted in order to secure these advantages: "Friendship does not pursue utility, but utility follows friendship." (Non igitur utilitatem amicitia, sed utilitas amicitiam secuta est, *Amic.* 51.) Seneca makes the same distinction: "Am I talking to you like an Epicurean again? Yes, but truly, what is to your advantage is also to mine. I am not your friend unless whatever matters to you is also my concern. Friendship makes a partnership in all things between us. Neither is anything favorable or unfavorable to one of us alone; our lives are shared." (Iterum ego tamquam Epicureus loquor? mihi vero idem expedit quod tibi: aut non sum amicus, nisi quidquid agitur ad te pertinens meum est. Consortium rerum omnium inter nos facit amicitia; nec secundi quicquam singulis est nec adversi; in commune vivitur, *Ep.* 48.2.)³²

The redefinition of friendship that emerges from these passages parallels Seneca's vision of the redistribution of wealth that will occur when we realize its true nature: what is true is our joint possession, and knowledge is the only true wealth. But whereas our possession of wealth can be instantaneous, if only the requisite shift of mind can be accomplished, our practice of philosophical friendship remains necessarily ongoing, reciprocal, and personal. Even in the final book of the collection, Seneca begins letters by evoking the intimacy and particularity of friendship with an individual. Letter 119, which argues for the sufficient provisions made for us by nature, begins by promising a financial tip. Seneca assures his addressee that he never withholds such knowledge: "Whenever I discover something, I don't wait for you to say 'Share it!' I say it to myself." (Quotiens aliquid inveni, non expecto donec dicas, "in commune": ipse mihi dico, 119.1.) After a vivid and elaborate build-up full of fiscal terminology, Seneca addresses his friend by name as he reveals the "shortcut to extreme wealth" (ad maximas . . . divitias compendiaria, 119.1): "There is no difference, my Lucilius, between not feeling the lack of something and possessing it." (Nihil enim, mi Lucili, interest utrum non desideres an habeas, 119.2.)

And yet this playful, apparently intimate passage does not address Seneca's

particular friend Lucilius any less problematically than did the beginning of Letter 27, discussed above, which moves in mere lines from Lucilius's imagined direct speech and Seneca's reply to "using you as my pretext, I examine myself. I cry out to myself." (*te adhibito mecum exigo. Clamo me ipse*, 27.1.) The slip-page from an external address to an interior colloquy is suggested equally strongly by the similar wording at the opening of Letter 119 ("*ipse mihi dico*"). Seneca retains the compelling notion of philosophical progress as a conversation between friends over the course of the collection, but recurrently there are moments of collapse, when the fiction of actual, external dialogue between two partners lapses into an internal conversation that seems to take place completely within the self. In the next chapter, we take up the significance of rapid oscillations between addressing the friend and addressing the self, as well as moments when the identity of one or more of the participants in Seneca's correspondence seems to shift and dissolve—when identity is asserted and roles are assumed, only to be instantly or subtly undercut.

7



REDEFINING IDENTITY

Persons, Letters, Friends

The letters in the first three books of the *Moral Epistles* sketch portraits of Lucilius, of Seneca, and of the friendship that connects them, based in their common pursuit of the happy life. Of course, this Lucilius is “Lucilius” and Seneca is “Seneca.” Each member of the pair is a character, and although the biographical details that characterize this Lucilius match those that are attributed to him elsewhere in Seneca’s corpus, his representation in the letters is governed by his dual role as mediator, first between the collection’s writer and its actual readers, from wealthy, educated contemporaries of Seneca all the way to us, and also between two halves of a single self, as a means of articulating an essentially internal dialogue.¹ In Lucilius, moreover, Seneca has created a role for us to inhabit while we learn to learn. Yet as helpful as “Seneca” and “Lucilius” are, the letters in the middle books of Seneca’s collection, starting with those in Book 4, are as likely to destabilize and dismantle our inferences about these characters as to consolidate or confirm them. Persistent and provocative markers of inconsistency in the text allow us to read these personae as stable, unitary phenomena only with great reservations. The terms “friend” (*amicus*) and “friendship” (*amicitia*) come in for the same rough treatment, as the status and definitions that emerged from earlier letters are probed, rejected, and retrieved.

Another game is also underway, as Seneca destabilizes and reasserts the formal epistolary identity of the texts that make up the collection by alternately highlighting and neglecting or undercutting epistolary conventions. One such convention is the tendency of letters to represent themselves explicitly as

a means of bridging the distance between correspondents, creating the illusion of shared presence, and at the same time to draw attention to the illusory quality of this togetherness, thus underlining the fact of separation. In these letters Seneca also plays around with personification and its opposite, representing texts as though they were people (a means whereby letters can replace their absent author), and people as though they were texts.² We have already seen an early instance in Letter 6, where Seneca describes himself in the letter's opening declaration, "I understand, Lucilius, that I am not only improved (*emendari*) but also transformed," using a verb reminiscent of manuscript production. Later in the same letter, he offers to send Lucilius annotated texts, a gift that will hasten Lucilius's own transformation and mitigate the correspondents' separation, not only through their original content, but also through Seneca's handwritten marginalia, which will provide Lucilius with a pleasant material reminder of his friend. These textual mediators will arrive as virtual tentmates (*contubernales*) for Lucilius, at the same time substituting for the real company of such teachers as Zeno, Epicurus, and Socrates and drawing attention to their absence. The parallel between Seneca's letters to Lucilius and the imagined companionship of long-dead philosophers becomes clearer when we re-read Letter 6 after reading the middle books of the *Moral Epistles*, in which exemplarity increasingly features as a pedagogic mode that complements epistolarity. Through much of Letter 30, the opening letter of Book 4, for example, the exemplary mode dominates. These tactics all work in tandem to challenge the literary and ethical expectations of Seneca's readers, and to further develop, I will argue, their philosophical capacity for independence.

In this chapter we examine the first half of Book 4, letter by letter, to see how these texts disrupt the definition and practice of epistolary friendship so carefully crafted in Books 1 through 3, with special attention to the exemplum of Aufidius Bassus, to which the bulk of Letter 30 is devoted. We also see how Letters 30 through 36 alternately encourage a reader to entertain conventional expectations about form, content, and context, and then undermine those expectations. These teases include the elision and reassertion of epistolary distance, encouragement for us to take on Lucilius's role and also to reject it, and the implication that an exemplum relayed in a letter can be a valid proxy for experience, coupled with reminders that letters are merely letters. The final section of this chapter turns to Letters 45 and 46 in Book 5, two letters that showcase Seneca's persistent, ironic reliance on traditional friendship practices and conventional epistolary rhetoric. Both the aesthetic debate and the exchange of texts recorded in these letters are eminently reminiscent of Cicero's literary friendships. To find these issues, treated this way, after Seneca's strong admonitions for his friend to withdraw from the world of polite attendance



at literary receptions will rightly give us pause, as well as further food for thought.

Epistolary Exemplarity

Letter 30 plunges straight into an account of an ailing friend's struggles, without giving any indication that we are reading a letter.³ "I have seen Aufidius Bassus, that excellent man, shaken, striving against old age. But now it has overpowered him; with a great, all-encompassing weight, old age bears down." (Bassum Aufidium, virum optimum, vidi quassum, aetati obluctantem. Sed iam plus illum degravat quam quod possit attolli; magno senectus et universo pondere incubuit, 30.1.) This vivid introduction of Aufidius Bassus heralds not only a new letter but also a new book. It directly follows the last letter that pays a debt to Lucilius by means of a maxim quoted from Epicurus, and opens a short series of letters that omit the payment of these little gifts or debts without comment, a series that ends when Seneca refuses Lucilius's request to resume the custom at the outset of Letter 33.⁴ In the letter's third line a second-person verb occurs, restoring a degree of familiar intimacy and engaging a triangular dynamic seen earlier in Letters 3, 11, and 29. The letter's opening sentence introduces a third friend who is an object of shared concern: "You know that his body was always weak and brittle; he sustained it for a considerable time, and I may say truly that he managed well, but suddenly he has succumbed." (Scis illum semper infirmi corporis et exsucti fuisse; diu illud continuit et, ut verius dicam, concinnavit: subito defecit, 30.1.) Nonetheless, the starkly reportorial opening of this letter marks a turn away from communication that is intensively and immediately directed toward Lucilius to a less particular, albeit still familiar and informal, mode of discourse.⁵ Seneca does not altogether abandon the epistolary mode, or his particular reader. He addresses Lucilius twice within the body of the letter ("Lucili" 4, "mi Lucili" 15), and concludes with a joke that reminds us we are reading correspondence: "But I ought to be anxious that you will despise so long a letter more than death. And so I will conclude." (Sed vereri debeo ne tam longas epistulas peius quam mortem oderis. Itaque finem faciam, 30.18.) The new emphasis on exemplary discourse that the appearance of Aufidius Bassus heralds does not replace epistolarity as a mode of writing or correspondence as a medium for friendship. Instead, the exemplary discourse of Letter 30 offers a complementary model for both reading and living.

Seneca is not foregrounded as an exemplar in Letter 30, as Bassus is, but his own behavior, as recounted by the letter, is as exemplary as that of Bassus. While Bassus teaches himself to die well by living out his old age engaged in philosophical conversation with his friends about the benignity of death,

Seneca is learning to die well by visiting, observing, and conversing with Bassus, as well as reporting and reflecting on his visits.⁶ Seneca interweaves his report of Bassus's exemplary behavior and words with his own meditations. As the reporter of virtue, Seneca's Letter 30 operates as an unacknowledged but necessary third participant in the exemplary discourse.⁷ In doing so, the letter promotes Seneca, too, as an exemplar of learning to die well, but an exemplar that operates differently from Bassus. While Bassus is learning by experience as well as through conversation, by undergoing the extreme debilitation of his body as well as by talking about the process and its meaning, Seneca learns the same lesson (how to die well) at a remove, by observing and reporting Bassus's experience and his own reaction to it.

Bassus noster videbatur mihi prosequi se et componere et vivere tamquam superstes sibi et sapienter ferre desiderium sui. Nam de morte multa loquitur et id agit sedulo ut nobis persuadeat, si quid incommodi aut metus in hoc negotio est, morientis vitium esse, non mortis; non magis in ipsa quicquam esse molestiae quam post ipsam. Tam demens autem est qui timet quod non est passurus quam qui timet quod non est sensurus. An quisquam hoc futurum credit, ut per quam nihil sentiat, ea sentiat? "Ergo" inquit "mors adeo extra omne malum est ut sit extra omnem malorum metum." Haec ego scio et saepe dicta et saepe dicenda, sed neque cum legerem aequè mihi profuerunt neque cum audirem iis dicentibus qui negabant timenda a quorum metu aberant: hic vero plurimum apud me auctoritatis habuit, cum loqueretur de morte vicina. . . . Libentissime itaque illum audiebam quasi ferentem de morte sententiam et qualis esset eius natura velut propius inspectae indicantem. (*Ep.* 30.5-7, 9)

Our Bassus seemed to attend his own funeral, to lay out his own corpse for burial, to go on living as if he were his own survivor, wisely bearing the loss of himself. For he speaks a great deal about death and does so with diligence, to persuade us that if there is anything unsettling or fearful in this business, it is the fault of the dying person, not of death, and also that there is not anything more bothersome in the moment of death than there is afterward. Moreover, a person is as senseless to fear what will not happen as he is to fear what he will not feel. Does anyone believe that he will feel the process through which he will come to feel nothing? "Therefore," he says, "death is so far from every evil that it lies beyond every fear of evil." I know these arguments, which are often said and should be said often, but never when I have read them have they profited me equally, nor when I have heard others speaking who were themselves not presently in apprehension of those things they denied should be feared. This man, though, had the utmost authority for me, when he was speaking about death with death just next door. . . . So I listened to him very gladly, as if he were making a decree and declaring what is death's nature when scrutinized, as it were, up close.



Seneca himself exemplifies a different and equally important lesson through Letter 30. Through its account of Seneca's course of instruction, and self-instruction, the letter demonstrates to Seneca's reader how to learn a moral lesson in the absence of direct, personal suffering. This lesson, a lesson about learning, is what Seneca's Letter 30 teaches most directly. But a single letter, while it may perform the necessary service of reporting virtue, does not have on its own the power to become an inculcator of virtue. Taken by itself, the single text does not have the emotional or argumentative leverage to persuade its reader to become either virtuous in the manner of Bassus or a learner of virtue in the manner of Seneca. It takes the full force of friendship nurtured through frequent, intimate correspondence to inculcate the lessons that Letter 30 offers.

Putting exemplary discourse into correspondence has two additional advantages. Both are benefits derived from writing down the experience for a second reader, preferably a friend: as Seneca recounts his experience with Bassus, he evaluates its meaning again, and as he articulates its significance, that significance is etched more deeply into his own mind. This benefit might come about in some measure from reporting the experience to any audience, but will be intensified when the writing is tailored to a friend, whose aims and interests are identical to one's own. Moreover, once exempla are fixed in writing, both their author and further readers can reactivate them endlessly. This benefit to readers may also be intensified by its context within a correspondence. Having taken on the role of Lucilius, a partner in correspondence, as our own responsibility, we may be more open to the lessons of exemplary discourse within the letters.

Nonetheless, Seneca has earlier confessed that being constantly in a philosopher's company is superior to reading his writings as a means of making moral progress.⁸ In Letter 6, he promises to send Lucilius annotated copies of the books that are making his rapid progress possible, but he concedes that they are less efficient teachers than real, shared presence (6.5). By drawing attention in its last lines to the fact that it is a letter ("Sed vereri debeo. . . Itaque finem faciam"), Letter 30 likewise calls attention to its apparent second-best status. Two answers suggest themselves as to why Seneca might end the letter on such a diffident note. For one thing, although spending time in Bassus's presence is better for learning how to die than reading about Seneca's doing so, correspondence is a better propaedeutic or preparation—that is, a better way of learning to learn virtue. After the build-up of Lucilius's and Seneca's characters, their friendship, and the reader's role in the collection's first three books, and the tear-down and reassessment of all these elements in Books 4 and 5, during which the reader adjusts from looking for Seneca to seeing "Seneca" in the letters, by Book 6 she is ready to learn from the exemplary series of letters that

feature both the author and the persona, without being unduly concerned or distracted by the imperfect overlap between the two. In a sense, she has arrived at the position that Seneca occupies vis-à-vis Bassus in Letter 30, so long as, as she is meant to do, she carefully suspends her awareness that text has replaced presence. A second reason for ending Letter 30 with a deprecating shrug and chuckle, as Seneca does, is that suggesting the inferiority of a letter to the real presence of an exemplar will provoke a reader's desire for Seneca himself. This reservation keeps the text from replacing the author too completely and so stokes a reader's desire to keep reading. More letters will never fully satisfy our appetite for Seneca's presence, but even the illusion of presence that letters produce can have beneficial effects, and for the aspiring Stoic, it is probably at least temporarily better to feed the appetite for ongoing correspondence with a friend than to starve it.⁹

Epistolary Inconsistency

In keeping with the immediacy of Letter 30's opening sentence, Letter 31 also begins with eyewitness testimony. Seneca declares: "I recognize my Lucilius. He begins to display himself as he had promised." (*Agnosco Lucilium meum: incipit quem promiserat exhibere*, 31.1.) The epistolary medium that enables Seneca to "see" Lucilius goes unmentioned, and Seneca's vision is represented as though it were unhindered by the discontinuity in space and time that is intrinsic to letters. If we are so inclined, we certainly may read in this sentence the suggestion that Seneca's recognition has not been triggered so much by a letter of Lucilius that he has just received as by the cumulative portrait of his friend that he has constructed in Books 1–3 of the *Moral Epistles*. Referring to Lucilius in the third person ("Lucilium meum") rather than writing "I recognize *you*" even suggests that Seneca may, for the moment, be speaking past Lucilius altogether to address us, his anonymous readers, instead. At the same time, the opening words "I recognize my Lucilius" may speak with startling urgency to a reader who has accepted the invitation of Letters 1–29 to step into Lucilius's shoes. Seneca's authoritative recognition licenses this reader to receive the body of the letter as a direct exhortation. Seneca urges Lucilius to go on building himself as he has begun, declares that the only true good is self-reliance ("sibi fidere," 31.3), and admonishes him not to let his individual circumstances or vicissitudes of any sort interrupt his task of making himself a god. Only chance determines whether our soul resides in a body with the status of an equestrian, a freedman, or a slave, Seneca reminds him, and these arbitrary social positions have no bearing on the capability of any human soul to become divine (31.11). In this letter, as elsewhere, Seneca characterizes the wise person as a



craftsman (*artifex*, 31.6), and the hands-on vocabulary he uses at the letter's end ("finges . . . materia . . . exprimi," 31.11) likens the work required to make oneself perfect in virtue to the craft of a sculptor or poet.

The opening of Letter 32 adds another instance of these letters' inconsistently epistolary quality: "I have been earnestly asking about you from everyone who comes here from where you are—what are you doing, where and with whom you spend your time." (*Inquiro de te et ab omnibus sciscitor qui ex ista regione veniunt quid agas, ubi et cum quibus moreris*, 32.1.) The first sentence, taken alone, is more suggestive of a letter than the beginnings of Letters 30 and 31. At least this text admits to the distance between writer and addressee, perhaps implying its epistolary status. But in the very next sentence, that distance disappears: "You cannot fool me: I am with you." (*Verba dare non potes: tecum sum*, 32.1.) The directness of "tecum sum" is even more startling than "Agnosco Lucilium meum" at the opening of Letter 31. It is as though, momentarily, the volume of letters has asserted that it *is* Seneca, looking back at us, not only recognizing our progress, but also scrutinizing all our actions. The replacement of Lucilius's name with a second-person pronoun may be all the more unsettling if we have taken refuge in both being and not being Lucilius to this point—that is, if we have accepted the collection's invitation to step into the role of Lucilius, the letters' addressee, but only as far as suits us, perhaps merely as an acquiescence to the formal conventions of reading, rather than as a step toward the philosophical conversion of our own lives. Ironically enough, for the reader who is discomfited by the thought of being recognized and scrutinized by Seneca's text, the report that Seneca has received in answer to his inquiries about Lucilius may be reassuring: "You ask what I found most pleasing from the reports I heard about you? Precisely that I heard nothing at all, because most of those people I asked did not know what you are doing." (*Quaeris quid me maxime ex iis quae de te audio delectet? quod nihil audio, quod plerique ex iis quos interrogo nesciunt quid agas*, 32.1.) However reassuring Lucilius's invisibility might be to a reader hesitant about being quizzed by Seneca's text, it carries a curious implication for his exemplary status. We are supposed to emulate, and eventually become better than, Seneca himself, but Lucilius has offered a more accessible example to the novice so far, particularly if we, like Lucilius, have not yet succeeded in retiring from public life, as Seneca already has. Yet now it appears that Lucilius's most admirable act has been to disappear, not merely from the public eye, but from the scrutiny of his mentor, and so from ours.

Seneca expresses his continued confidence (*fiduciam*, 32.2) that Lucilius will persevere in his promising retirement, even if surrounded by crowds of people who threaten to slow his progress. It is commonplace for Roman authors, including Seneca, to deplore the distractions of crowds, and Seneca has been

concerned from the collection's first letter about the ease with which most people squander time. But the way that he expresses his concern here may hint at a second level of meaning: "Moreover, he who delays you harms you considerably, especially in the great brevity of our life, which we make still shorter by inconstancy, repeatedly making one beginning of it and then another; we divide it into little bits and scatter it." (*Multum autem nocet etiam qui moratur, utique in tanta brevitate vitae, quam breviorē inconstantia facimus, aliud eius subinde atque aliud facientes initium; diducimus illam in particulas ac lancinamus*, 32.2.) If the letter collection is taken, in some sense, to reproduce a life, then this remark on how not to live may also be read as advice on how not to read. Rather than starting afresh with each letter, it is time to start reading the collection as a continuous and progressive whole.

In the next letter, Seneca confronts Lucilius's request that he return to including maxims, the little gifts with which he closed each letter in the collection's first three books. He refuses, and then gives an extended tutorial on how more advanced philosophical reading should proceed.¹⁰ In short, Lucilius is instructed to pay attention to the whole interwoven texture of the work he reads, rather than seeking to pluck out its most brilliant thoughts. The grounds for Seneca's refusal to resume inserting *flosculi* into the letters are worth noting. In the first place, he writes, the most important thinkers of their school were not concerned with excerpts. Second, the whole cloth of their writing is worth reading: "*totus contextus illorum virilis est*" (33.1). As Seneca steers Lucilius toward the emulation of these exemplars, whose texts are characterized, if not quite personified, as "manly" (*virilis*), his injunction to Lucilius and the reader to apprehend and value continuity also signals a turn toward exemplarity as a mode for the letter collection. The progress of both partners as recorded by the letters can act as a cumulative example for each of them, as well as for further readers.¹¹ At the same time, Seneca's refusal to return to the perpetually renewed playful metaphorical indebtedness of the first few books is also a turn away from the emphasis on exchange and reciprocity, whether in or out of balance, that has pervaded the correspondence so far.

Bridge and Barrier: Overcoming Absence, with Letters or without Them

Reading a friend's letter may make us feel that we are in his presence, but it is equally likely to remind us that we are not. The power of letters to erase distance between writer and reader, and its antithesis—namely, the reminder of absence that the illusion of presence inevitably creates—is such a pervasive trope of correspondence that Janet Altman identifies it as one of the



defining traits of epistolary discourse.¹² But the beginnings of Letters 30, 31, and 32 ignore the convention of marking an addressee's absence this way, instead speaking directly to their addressee as though nothing separated him from Seneca. Further along in the middle books of the collection, Letters 40 and 55 make claims for the power of letters to erase distance that are somewhat reminiscent of the openings of Letters 31 ("Agnosco") and 32 ("tecum sum"). In both cases, however, the epistolary framework for Seneca and Lucilius's interactions is more forthrightly acknowledged than is the case in Letters 32 or 31, and both later letters make extravagant claims about the potential for letters, enlivened by the imagination, to simulate joint participation in activities ideally shared with friends. Letter 40 opens with a strikingly physical, immediate declaration of the effect a letter has on its recipient: "Thank you for writing to me so often, for in this way you show yourself to me in the only way possible. Whenever I receive a letter from you, immediately we are together." (*Quod frequenter mihi scribis gratias ago; nam quo uno modo potes te mihi ostendis. Numquam epistulam tuam accipio ut non protinus una simus*, 40.1.) This assertion is somewhat undercut by the qualification that follows, which recalls the sentimental friendships discussed in chapter 3: "For what is sweetest in the sight of a friend—namely, to recognize him—the hand of a friend impressed on his letter also affords." (*Nam quod in conspectu dulcissimum est, id amici manus epistulae inpressa praestat, agnoscere*, 40.1.) The sweet recognition of "true traces of an absent friend" (*vera amici absentis vestigia*, 40.1) that a letter provides also reminds us that a letter cannot overcome absence, but remains always only a substitute for the true presence of a friend.

In Letter 55, Seneca's tour of Vatia's villa inspires an extended meditation on the unimportance of their separation, culminating in a strong claim for the power of the imagination aided by correspondence.¹³

Conversari cum amicis absentibus licet, et quidem quotiens velis, quamdiu velis. . . . Amicus animo possidendus est; hic autem numquam abest; quemcumque vult cotidie videt. Itaque mecum stude, mecum cena, mecum ambula: in angusto vivebamus, si quicquam esset cogitationibus clusum. Video te, mi Lucili; cum maxime audio; adeo tecum sum ut dubitem an incipiam non epistulas sed codicillos tibi scribere. (*Ep.* 55.9, 11)

You may converse with absent friends, in fact, as often as you like and for as long as you like. . . . A friend must be possessed by the mind; then he is never absent. The mind sees whomsoever it wishes daily. And so study with me, eat with me, walk with me. We would live in narrow confines if anything was excluded from our thoughts. I see you, Lucilius. I even hear you. I am with you

to such a degree that I wonder whether I should begin to write you little memos rather than letters.

It seems unlikely that Seneca expects to dispense with letters altogether, but his insistence here that imagined conversations are as enjoyable as those which happen either face to face or by letter implicitly criticizes the failure of self-sufficiency that the epistolary bridge/barrier trope underwrites. True friendship, as we saw in chapter 6, must not infringe on either partner's independence, and may not entail a loss of autonomy. The passage from Letter 55 seems almost designed as a rebuke of the more typical sentiments expressed by Cicero in a letter to Atticus:

Nihil mihi nunc scito tam deesse quam hominem eum quocum omnia quae me cura aliqua adficiunt una communicem, qui me amet, qui sapiat, quicum ego cum loquar nihil fingam, nihil dissimulem, nihil obtegā. . . . Tu autem, qui saepissime curam et angorem animi mei sermone et consilio levasti tuo, qui mihi et in publica re socius et in privatis omnibus conscius et omnium meorum sermonum et consiliorum particeps esse soles, ubinam es? . . . Nam illae ambitiosae nostrae fucosaeque amicitiae sunt in quodam splendore forensi, fructum domesticum non habent; itaque cum bene completa domus est tempore matutino, cum ad forum stipati gregibus amicorum descendimus, reperire ex magna turba neminem possumus quocum aut iocari libere aut suspirare familiariter possimus. Qua re te exspectamus, te desideramus, te iam etiam arcessimus. Multa sunt enim quae me sollicitant anguntque; quae mihi videor auris nactus tuas unius ambulationis sermone exhaurire posse. (*Att.* 1.18.1 [18])

Know that nothing now is so lacking for me as a man with whom I may share as one in all those matters that give me some cause for worry, who loves me, who understands me, with whom, when I talk with him, I may skip all pos-turing, pretence, or evasion. . . . You, moreover, who have most often lightened my anxiety and anguish of spirit with your conversation and advice, you who are both my ally in public business and my confidant in all private matters and accustomed to partake in all my conversations and plans, where are you? . . . For those ambitious and ostentatious friendships of mine possess a certain public splendor, but they don't yield benefits at home. And thus, although my house is well filled in the morning, although I descend to the forum thronged by a flock of friends, I can find no one in that great crowd with whom I may joke freely or share a knowing sigh. For this reason, I am waiting for you, I am wishing for you, I even now summon you. For there are many things that wrench and wring me which, when your ears are at my disposal, I think I will be able to clear away completely in one walk's conversation.



Whereas Cicero awaits, longs for, and summons Atticus (“te exspectamus, te desideramus, te iam etiam arcessimus”) in order to pour out all the worries he cannot entrust to the supposed friends who greet him in the morning and accompany him to the forum, the tranquility of Seneca’s retreat from worldly things so strengthens his power of mind that he is able to summon Lucilius at will for the satisfying, albeit imaginary, companionship that Cicero desires in vain, since he requires the actual presence of his friend. Writing Atticus a confidential letter is only a palliative measure for Cicero, but for Seneca, writing to Lucilius is as good as having him by his side (“mecum stude, mecum cena, mecum ambula”).

As he does in Letters 31 and 32, here in Letter 55 Seneca seems to speak directly to us, and again he makes a claim for philosophical friendship that conspicuously ignores its epistolary medium. The closeness to his friend that Seneca seeks in Letter 55 is to be achieved by communion of minds rather than through letters. Yet having attained this intimacy, in the very next line Seneca jokes about abandoning correspondence proper (*epistulae*) for *codicilli*, informal notes jotted on writing tablets and passed from hand to hand.¹⁴ Seneca’s joke equates epistolary presence with actual presence, but at the same time it subtly calls attention to a double illusion. For, of course, the reader of the *Moral Epistles* who encounters these words in the published form of a scroll or codex is doubly distant from their author, removed from him in space, the gulf that his joke suggests has been bridged for himself and Lucilius, and also in time.

Reassurance and Fresh Challenges

The opening of Letter 33 departs from the two that precede it. It does not make perplexing declarations about the virtual or actual presence of either correspondent. Rather, it takes up a topic that has occurred earlier in the collection: what to read and how to read it. It does so in a first sentence that reassures by being typically epistolary in both its diction and its content.¹⁵ Seneca restates a request by Lucilius that he resume the practice of including sayings from other philosophers in his letters. He begins with a second-person verb, *desideras*, and refers to letters that we have already read. Both early on and at its end, Letter 33 also reiterates Seneca’s conviction, set forth at the end of Book 1, that truth is a common possession. There: “What is true is mine. . . . What is best belongs to all.” (Quod verum est meum est . . . quae optima sunt esse communia, 12.11.) In Letter 33, “I prefer you not judge that these [words] belong to Epicurus; they are held in common, and they are particularly ours.” (Itaque nolo illas Epicuri existimes esse: publicae sunt et maxime nostrae, 33.2.) Later: “The truth lies open to all. It is not yet fully possessed. Indeed, much from it remains

for future generations.” (Patet omnibus veritas; nondum est occupata; multum ex illa etiam futuris relictum est, 33.11.) Letter 33 reminds us of our place in the correspondence we are reading, observers who are invited to step into Lucilius’s place, acting as third participants in the exchange by reading letters actively and responsively, and by taking possession of the truth for ourselves. Thus, its reader is reassured and also challenged. Note Seneca’s impatient tone: “How long are you going to keep on learning? It’s time to teach!” (Quousque discas? iam et praecipe, 33.9.)¹⁶

Letter 33 reasserts the epistolary form and the importance of the progressive, sequential nature of the correspondence we are reading, and it hints at the potentially analogous relation between an exemplary life of reading and writing and its record in letters. But the challenges that it issues are only amplified by Letter 34, which turns back to the questions about the stability and separability of identity and the relationships between author, reader, and text that were raised by Letters 30–32, and indeed intensifies them. This short letter is packed with imagery that insists on the participation of both partners, but initially appears to exclude any third participant. The profusion of metaphorical two-part relationships in the letter’s first half may suggest that the reader of this letter, whether Lucilius or, because he is not named in the letter, anyone who inhabits the reader’s position, is a product of Seneca’s own making.¹⁷ Here is the first half of the letter in full:

Cresco et exulto et discussa senectute recalesco quotiens ex iis quae agis ac scribis intellego quantum te ipse—nam turbam olim reliqueras—superieceris. Si agricolam arbor ad fructum perducta delectat, si pastor ex fetu gregis sui capit voluptatem, si alumnum suum nemo aliter intuetur quam ut adulescentiam illius suam iudicet, quid evenire credis iis qui ingenia educaverunt et quae tenera formaverunt adulta subito vident? Adsero te mihi; meum opus es. Ego cum vidissem indolem tuam, inieci manum, exhortatus sum, addidi stimulos nec lente ire passus sum sed subinde incitavi; et nunc idem facio, sed iam currentem hortor et invicem hortantem. (*Ep.* 34.1–2)

I grow and rejoice, and, my years shaken off, my blood grows warm every time I understand from what you do and write how far you have outdone yourself, for you have left the crowd far behind. If the farmer delights in a tree bearing fruit, if a shepherd takes pleasure in the lambs of his flock, if no one gazes on his foster child without thinking of his own youth, what do you think happens for those men who educate young intellects and then see those whom they shaped suddenly mature? I claim you for myself; you are my work. When I saw your potential, I claimed possession. I exhorted you, I applied the goad, and I did not allow you to go slowly—I stirred you up over and over again. And



now I do likewise, but I urge on a man who is already running, and who in turn encourages me.

Although the opening sentence does eventually include second-person verbs (*agis, scribis, reliqueras, superieceris*), pride of place goes to those in the first person (*cresco, exulto, recalesco*). At the start of the letter, the emphasis is on Seneca's flourishing. Lucilius's progress is acknowledged not for its own sake, but as the source of Seneca's rejuvenation. The well-being of the two partners is interconnected, and strikingly so—word order puts the primary emphasis on Seneca, but the words themselves—*cresco, recalesco*—suggest that if Seneca were a plant, then Lucilius would be his gardener, or possibly his sun and rain. *Exulto*, the first word of this letter, occurs only here and at the beginning of Letter 19, where Seneca's rejoicing was similarly inspired by the benefits he expected to reap from Lucilius's continued progress in philosophy. In the letter's first sentence, Seneca's reliance on his partner is clear. However, the next lines reverse his initial acknowledgment of dependence, and Seneca asserts his own authoritative position. Lucilius is Seneca's tree, his lamb, his nursling, and finally, his *opus*, a word that refers to the product of a person's agricultural, military, or artistic endeavor.¹⁸ The comparisons Seneca makes are all to pairs: farmer and crop, shepherd and lamb, child and guardian, author and book. In each case, the second term depends on the first. The crop does not survive without the farmer, the lamb without its shepherd, the child without its nurse. Seneca simultaneously claims credit for the moral progress of his friend Lucilius, and with the phrase "meum opus es" he may also claim "Lucilius" as a product of his own imagination. However, the logic of this list breaks down with this final claim. A work cannot come into existence without its author, but it can endure in its author's absence.¹⁹ Without a reader, on the other hand, a work does not flourish. So Seneca's claim to authorship also acts as a validation of our role as readers.

Nonetheless, the rush of two-part metaphors puts the reader back into the position of an onlooker, rather than an active participant. The effect is unsettling. We may have weathered rapid changes of perspective in Book 4 so far by occupying simultaneously Lucilius's place and a third position, balancing our roles as both the direct recipients of Seneca's words and external observers. Now, this series of pairs momentarily suggests that unless we acquiesce totally in identifying with Lucilius, we may be left on the outside looking in. But if we do step squarely into Lucilius's place, we may find ourselves stripped of agency altogether: "I claim you for myself; you are my work" (*Adsero te mihi; meum opus es*, 34.2). If we identify with Lucilius now, we are threatened with reduction to the status of an object authored by Seneca, unable to thrive on our own.

“Adsero te mihi” is as significant as “meum opus es” in posing this threat. A second-person pronoun (*te*) is enclosed by a verb and pronoun both referring to Seneca, and the verb declares that Seneca’s claim on Lucilius (or the reader) is absolute. Moreover, this verb, *adsero*, was used in claiming ownership of a slave, as well as in a formal declaration of manumission.²⁰ Both Seneca’s wording and his word order underline the right of possession that “meum opus es” suggests. Just as a book implies a reader, a slave implies a master: Lucilius belongs to Seneca, his to free or to enslave.

The next sentence contains a similarly resonant phrase, “iniecī manum”—literally, “I laid my hand on (you).” The phrase is drawn from *iniectio*, the legal procedure by which a Roman citizen could retake possession of strayed belongings such as runaway slaves. Seneca has already used this legal metaphor once before. The collection’s first letter, discussed in chapter 5, begins by alluding to the legal action of *vindicatio*. Seneca urges Lucilius to claim possession of himself, for himself (“Ita fac, mi Lucili: vindica te tibi,” 1.1). He elaborates by directing Lucilius to reclaim possession of his time, an action that he figures as *iniectio*: “Therefore do as you write that you do, Lucilius, embrace every hour. So may it be that you depend less on tomorrow, if you have taken possession of today.” (Fac ergo, mi Lucili, quod facere te scribis, omnes horas complectere; sic fiet ut minus ex crastino pendeas, si hodierno manum inieceris, 1.2.)²¹ Now, in Letter 34, after indirectly confessing his dependence on Lucilius, and asserting Lucilius’s dependence on him, Seneca turns again to this legal metaphor to make a complex point. To wit, by claiming Lucilius as his invention and his possession, Seneca reveals to his reader the limits of adopting Lucilius’s role for his or her own. Additionally, Seneca reasserts his own autonomy. Although the opening of the letter suggests his continuing dependence on a partner, the following sentences declare that Lucilius’s usefulness is the outcome of Seneca’s mastery. Indeed, “addidi stimulos” (I applied the goad) adds a vivid evocation of the master-slave relationship to the legal language (*adsero*, *inieci*) that has preceded it.²²

The final two-part metaphor of Letter 34 describes Seneca as a man urging on a runner. But he is not on the sidelines, coaching. He too is running. The passage began with a series of strongly hierarchical pairs through which Seneca asserted his authority. But in its final words, Seneca revises the balance of power: “And now I do likewise, but I urge on a man who is already running, and who in turn encourages me” (et nunc idem facio, sed iam currentem hortor et invicem hortantem, 34.2). Seneca’s reader has progressed far enough that he is now Seneca’s fellow runner, and so he is responsible for encouraging his friend, as well as responding to encouragement. The authority that the older partner once wielded is now shared equally between the two men. In Letter



109, the runner metaphor reappears when Seneca explains how even Stoic sages benefit one another: “The wise person will help the wise, not, indeed, by his own strength, but by the strength of him whom he will help . . . an encourager helps even the man already running.” (Proderit sapienti sapiens, non scilicet tantum suis viribus sed ipsius quem adiuvabit. . . . adiuvat etiam currentem hortator, 109.6.) Significantly, neither runner depends on the other. Yet their relationship continues, and continues to be mutually beneficial.²³

The second half of Letter 34 begins with continued deference by Lucilius: “What then should I do,’ you ask, ‘for I am willing.” (“Quid illud,” inquis, “adhuc volo,” 34.3.) Seneca’s response lays stress on the will to be good (“pars magna bonitatis est velle fieri bonum,” 34.3), and then comments on what constitutes goodness. The good man is complete, immune to circumstance, and internally consistent in thought and action. The description implies, though it does not state, the good man’s absolute autonomy. Ultimately, each of us can only free himself. The reader’s apparent exclusion from the binary relationships listed in the first half of Letter 34 in fact amounts to an ultimatum: we cannot remain in the position of lambs or fosterlings, because such states amount to continued enslavement. We must become independent of our teacher, and we must choose to become so. Within Letter 34, however, Seneca does not explicitly state the necessity for choosing an independent existence beyond the metaphorical pairs he lists or from a less metaphorical two-part relationship that he does not mention—that of writer and reader. Moreover, his encouraging response to the question “What then should I do?” (*Quid illud?*) reinforces the sense this letter gives of his continued commitment to dialogue, as, on a formal level, does the interjection of a question halfway through the letter. The two-part conversation continues, and continues to be productive, in spite of the fact that ideally neither partner will need for it to go on, and each partner must be willing and able to claim his independence from the other.

Impossible, Euphemistic, Anonymous Friends

If the binary pairs featured in the first half of Letter 34 should lure a reader into accepting Seneca as shepherd, gardener, or foster parent, and into mistaking the role of docile disciple as a permanently acceptable one, Letter 35 presents a correction. Yet in its opening sentence Seneca seems to be restating his claim on Lucilius in terms not too different from those of Letter 34 (“Adsero te mihi; meum opus es”). This letter restates the mutual benefit shared by Letter 34’s metaphorical runners in terms that sound blatantly self-interested.

Cum te tam valde rogo ut studeas, meum negotium ago: habere amicum volo, quod contingere mihi, nisi pergis ut coepisti excolere te, non potest. Nunc enim amas me, amicus non es. "Quid ergo? haec inter se diversa sunt?" immo dissimila. Qui amicus est amat; qui amat non utique amicus est; itaque amicitia semper prodest, amor aliquando etiam nocet. (*Ep.* 35.1)

When I urge you to keep at it, I am doing my own business. I want to have you as a friend, a benefit that is not possible for me to obtain unless you keep on as you have begun. For now you love me, but you are not my friend. "What? Are there differences between loving and being a friend?" Yes, indeed. They are dissimilar. He who is a friend loves, but he who loves is not on that account a friend. For friendship always benefits, but love can sometimes even cause harm.

Why does Seneca explain his motives here in such apparently selfish terms ("meum negotium ago: habere . . . , contingere"), and why does he make a distinction between love and friendship that hinges on the inevitability of benefit (*prodest*) in friendship and its potential absence or contravention in love? The two questions are connected. Through the opening sentences of this letter, Seneca signals both his awareness of previous definitions of friendship that noted the etymological association between *amor* and *amicitia* and his departure, both stylistic and substantial, from those precedents. In particular, Seneca may be thinking of Cicero's *De amicitia*, where Laelius says,

Amor enim, ex quo amicitia nominata est, princeps est ad benivolentiam coniungendam; nam utilitates quidem etiam ab eis percipiuntur saepe qui simulatione amicitiae coluntur et observantur temporis causa; in amicitia autem nihil fictum est, nihil simulatum, et quidquid est, id est verum et voluntarium. (*Amic.* 26)

For the first thing to bring people together in a relationship of good will is love, from which friendship derives its name. There are, indeed, practical advantages to be enjoyed also by those whose society is cultivated by others and who receive favors, under the pretense of friendship, for friendly expediency; but in friendship itself, pretense and deception have no place; whatever is done, must be done freely and truthfully.²⁴

Laelius's words here suggest, and elsewhere the dialogue confirms, that he and Seneca would agree that true friendship is pursued and valued for its own sake. But Laelius's characterization of love as "the first thing to bring people together in a relationship of good will" (*benivolentia*) may blur categories that



Seneca wishes to keep separate. *Benevolentia* is a key term in *amicitia*-related transactions in Cicero's familiar correspondence, but it occurs only once in the *Moral Epistles*.²⁵ The opening words of Letter 35 recall euphemistic Ciceronian *amicitia* as practiced in the *Ad familiares* rather than the ideal relationship described in the *De amicitia*. But as the letter continues, Seneca reveals that it is true friendship that he seeks from Lucilius, not a euphemistic exchange of favors. Seneca seeks a sharper differentiation between true and apparent *amicitia* that will reveal a parallel distinction between apparent and real self-interest. He takes account of the threat posed to true friendship when one partner subordinates his pursuit of goodness to his perception of the other partner's interest—that is, when one partner does a favor for the other that may not be in his own true self-interest, which is his pursuit of virtue. Moreover, ill-judged favors may create obligations that are misestimated by their recipients and thus insufficiently repaid, or that compromise their recipient's autonomy, even when the giver's intention was kind. Only the wise person is sure-footed enough to avoid these missteps.²⁶ Thus, in Letter 35, although Seneca frankly admits that his own well-being profits from Lucilius's progress, he also emphasizes that Lucilius must continue to progress for his own sake:

Festina ergo dum mihi proficis, ne istuc alteri didiceris. Ego quidem percipio iam fructum, cum mihi fingo uno nos animo futuros et quidquid aetati meae vigoris abcessit, id ad me ex tua, quamquam non multum abest, rediturum; sed tamen re quoque ipsa esse laetus volo. Venit ad nos ex iis quos amamus etiam absentibus gaudium, sed id leve et evanidum: conspectus et praesentia et conversatio habet aliquid vivae voluptatis, utique si non tantum quem velis sed qualem velis videas. (*Ep.* 35.2–3)

Make haste, therefore, while you are perfecting yourself for me, that you not learn this for someone other than yourself. Make no mistake, I already am reaping a benefit when I imagine that we will be of one mind, and that however much of my strength has been sapped by age, it will return to me from your youth, although we are not so far apart in age. But still, I want to be happy also in realized fact. Joy comes to us from those whom we love even when they are absent, but it is light and momentary. Sight and presence and conversation have a certain living pleasure, if, at any rate, you see not only the person whom you wish for, but the *sort* of person you wish.

The point that Seneca makes at the end of this section is important: we don't get pleasure from the conversation and presence of a man whom we love unless he is also the sort of man that we love—that is, a person striving to be virtuous. This is a subtle reinforcement of the differentiation between "friends" and real

friends that Seneca has made over and over, beginning with Letter 3, and here it is couched in terms that are epistolary by association. The pleasure of calling to mind our absent friend and the illusion of presence that act creates, and the falling short of that pleasure in comparison with the pleasure of actual presence, are basic dynamics of epistolary relations that are well represented in the *Moral Epistles*. But Seneca here adds a refinement to the source of the pleasure we experience in a friend's company: true pleasure springs not from the presence of a merely desired person but from the presence of a good person.

The Stoic *proficiens*, the aspiring philosopher, is not wise, however, nor is he or she good. It follows that he or she is not capable of reliably distinguishing true from apparent joys, or telling true from apparent self-interest. At least some of the time, her efforts at being truly a friend to Seneca will fail. Faced with a paradox—namely, the unbridgeable gap between what ordinary persons can do and what philosophy requires—Seneca takes refuge in euphemism: “Offer yourself to me, therefore, as a great gift.” (*Adfer itaque te mihi, ingens munus*, 35.3.) In asking his friend to become a gift, Seneca exploits a powerful connotation of voluntarism. Gifts, Roman courtesy declares, are freely given, without obligation on the part of either giver or recipient. The operations of obligation that in fact do continue to obtain in gift exchange are thus fully veiled and effectively denied by misrecognition, the effortless joint complicity of all parties. Seneca continues: “. . . and press on all the more, mindful that you are mortal and I am an old man. Hasten to me, but first to yourself. Accomplish and care for this task before all others, so you may be square with yourself.” (. . . *et quo magis instes, cogita te mortalem esse, me senem. Propera ad me, sed ad te prius. Profice et ante omnia hoc cura, ut constes tibi*, 35.3–4.) In making his extraordinary request, Seneca stresses the independent thinking and agency of his friend (*adfer, cogita, propera, profice*), and he insists that his interlocutor must act primarily for his own sake: Give yourself to me (*mihi*), but do it in your own interest (*tibi*).²⁷

Yet the second half of the sentence (“et quo magis”) abruptly undoes the magic trick accomplished by using “gift” in its first half. Mentioning Seneca’s age cannot help but suggest obligation. The following sentence immediately attempts to correct for this suggestion (“*propera . . . te*”), but the reminder of youth’s duty to age is not easily effaced, particularly because Seneca has now raised the issue twice within this letter.²⁸ Moreover, Seneca’s age and his protégé’s relative youth were vividly evoked in Letter 34, as we have already seen. Consequently, the use of *munus* as euphemism, suggesting that Lucilius may in fact freely give himself to Seneca without incurring a debt, does not entirely succeed. As he has done in earlier letters, here again Seneca employs a euphemism and then immediately admits its essential falsity. Even the most



generously intended gift incurs an obligation to make a return. Rather than try to resolve this intractable point, Seneca subtly emphasizes it, in a continuing attempt to keep the rules of friendship and the Stoic goal of autonomy counterpoised in productive tension.

So it is that after pointing out the impossibility of friendship without obligation in Letter 35, Seneca begins Letter 36 with the word “friend” and treats it as an unproblematic term. The instability or erosion of personal identity that characterizes his treatment of the first and second persons in the first half of Book 4 is extended to the third person, the friend, in this letter. Here in Letter 36, at the halfway point of the book, the question of identity—or, rather, the progressive diminution of personal identity—comes together notably with the theme of friendship. The letter begins this way: “Encourage your friend bravely to defy those ‘friends’ of his who scold him for seeking solitude and leisure, and for supposedly deserting his good standing in society, and, although he was able to pursue higher standing still, for preferring the quiet life to all honors.” (*Amicum tuum hortare ut istos magno animo contemnat qui illum obiurgant quod umbram et otium petierit, quod dignitatem suam destituerit et, cum plus consequi posset, praetulerit quietem omnibus, 36.1.*)

This friend remains the subject of the better part of Letter 36 and is conspicuously anonymous throughout. His choice to abandon a successful public career sounds suspiciously similar to the course Lucilius (the “you” of the letters) has chosen to pursue. For that matter, the criticisms leveled against him could have also dogged Seneca (the “I” of the letters). Whereas Cicero might omit a friend’s name out of discretion (or to make a disingenuous display of discretion), Seneca omits the name of Lucilius’s friend not to protect his subject’s identity, but to suggest its unimportance. Any person pursuing this course of life would be subject to similar criticism, and would welcome the same support from his true friends that Seneca urges Lucilius to give. Extending this kind of friendship to an unnamed third person at this juncture suggests, as does the omission of Lucilius’s name from all the letters between Letters 32 and 41, that the second-person position, that of Seneca’s respondent, is increasingly an open one. Rather than putting ourselves self-consciously into Lucilius’s place, we may now inhabit the responsive reader’s place on our own terms. The less frequent evocations of Lucilius in these letters, a diminution that continues as the collection continues, may contribute to a sense that the lessons Seneca works through are increasingly generalized, addressed to and available to any reader who has progressed with him through the collection thus far, even though the formal epistolary framework manages to retain some devotion at least to the ideal of the intimacy and intensity of correspondence between friends.²⁹ The diminished attention to Lucilius from this point onward may tend also to focus a

reader's attention more closely on the one remaining identifiable, if not always consistent, character in the correspondence—that is, Seneca.

The marked refusal to put a name to Lucilius's anonymous retired friend continues over the course of Letter 36, and financial metaphor makes an extended appearance, in tandem with another provocative appeal to self-interest:

Facies ergo rem utilissimam tibi, si illum quam optimum feceris; haec aiunt beneficia esse expetenda tribuendaque, non dubie primae sortis, quae tam dare prodest quam accipere. Denique nihil illi iam liberi est, spondit; minus autem turpe est creditori quam spei bonae decoquere. Ad illud aes alienum solvendum opus est negotianti navigatione prospera, agrum colenti ubertate eius quam colit terrae, caeli favore: ille quod debet sola potest voluntate persolvi. (*Ep.* 36.4–5)

Thus you will do something extremely useful for yourself, if you make your friend as good as possible. People say that those benefits, without a doubt the chief kind, that are as profitable to give as to receive should be both sought out and granted. And finally, he is not at all free; he is solemnly bound [to continue the course of life and study on which he has embarked]. For it is less despicable to default on a loan than on good expectation. For a merchant to pay off his debts, a prosperous voyage is required; for a farmer, fertile fields and propitious weather are required; what your friend owes can be repaid solely through his willing it.

Seneca urges his reader's friend to study and practice consistent tranquility in the face of life's vicissitudes (36.6), but in the end Letter 36 advises the friend to apply himself to a lesson that is applicable in all circumstances, against every kind of weapon and any enemy ("adversus omnia tela, . . . omne hostium genus")—that is, a reasoned disregard for death ("mortem contemnere," 36.8). The lesson that was personified by Aufidius Bassus in Letter 30 is thus made general in Letter 36. Later letters on scorning death emphasize the accessibility of a good death to anyone, sometimes using specific examples. The arc of Letter 77 extends from an account of the voluntary, philosophical death of Tullius Marcellinus to the impetuous but noble suicide of an enslaved Spartan boy, recapitulating the movement from Letters 30 to 36 within the compass of one letter, and demonstrating on a smaller scale how Seneca uses exemplarity and anonymity as complementary tactics.³⁰

Exchanging Literary Gifts

Correspondence between friends cannot be detached entirely from its roots in social life. But far from giving up on familiar correspondence, in the middle



books of the collection Seneca continues to produce letters that mimic the exchanges between friends in Ciceronian correspondence and that exploit readily expectations for those kinds of exchanges. In doing so, he displays his continued willingness to keep his reader's attention by using conventional forms of interaction even when doing so risks putting him at odds with the substance of his teaching. Letters 45 and 46, for example, concern an exchange of non-epistolary texts written by the two partners in correspondence.³¹ These letters were touched on briefly in chapter 5, but they warrant fuller consideration. Letter 45 replies to Lucilius's request for books written by Seneca ("libros meos," 45.3), and couches its serious subject matter between a predictable epistolary preface and concluding remarks that ostentatiously remind us that we are reading a letter. Letter 46 is shorter and has no overt philosophical content. It opens with Seneca's acknowledgment of a book Lucilius has sent, followed by an extended appreciation of its style. These two letters are among the more improbable vehicles Seneca uses to prescribe and promote philosophical living. The fact that he nonetheless manages to turn them to this purpose showcases his rhetorical dexterity.³²

A number of the *Moral Epistles* anticipate or respond to requests from Lucilius for books, preferably annotated or accompanied by commentaries by Seneca to guide his reading (e.g., *Ep.* 6, 33, 39). Letter 45 begins similarly, by reporting Lucilius's complaint that where he is, there are insufficient books to read. Seneca answers this complaint first with a point he has made before (at *Ep.* 2.2): it is better to read a small number of great books thoroughly. Much like Letter 33, this letter reassures its reader by starting from a familiar theme. This is followed by another commonplace of epistolary friendship, the superiority of face-to-face conversation. This opening riff provides an easy point of entry to the body of letter, which criticizes not a kind of reading, but a kind of philosophy. Seneca discourages Lucilius from becoming overly concerned with sifting the meaning of words, when the failure to discriminate accurately among things (*res*) is what really matters for living well, and is thus philosophy's proper concern: "Things deceive; sift them. . . . How similar is flattery to friendship! Flattery not only imitates friendship, but overcomes it and overtakes it; it is received with open and welcoming ears, and it touches the bottom of our hearts. The more pleasing it is, the more it does harm: for this reason, teach me how to distinguish their similarity." (*Res fallunt: illas discerne. . . . Adulatio quam similis est amicitiae! Non imitatur tantum illam sed vincit et praeterit; apertis ac propitiis auribus recipitur et in praecordia ima descendit, eo ipso gratiosa quo laedit: doce quemadmodum hanc similitudinem possim dinoscere, 45.6–7.*) When in the body of this letter Seneca urges the importance of discerning between semantic hair-splitting and matters of real substance by

invoking *adulatio* and *amicitia*, two things that look the same but are crucially different below the surface, he implicitly criticizes the kind of conventional friendship that the opening of this letter has evoked. After its opening salvo of epistolary topoi, Seneca replies to a request Lucilius has made: “As for asking me to send my books to you, no more does it make me think myself eloquent than I should think myself lovely should you ask for my picture. I know this request stems from kindness rather than judgment, or if from judgment, then a judgment imposed on you by kindness” (*Ceterum quod libros meos tibi mitti desideras, non magis ideo me disertum puto quam formosum putarem si imaginem meam peteres. Indulgentiae scio istud esse, non iudici; et si modo iudici est, indulgentia tibi inposuit, 45.3*).

A relationship partially or even largely constituted by requests for and exchanges of texts authored by the participants, accompanied by effusively complimentary cover letters, was conventionally called friendship. And on the surface, nothing in Seneca’s reply criticizes or condemns Lucilius’s request. His response is genial, and conventionally modest. His polite demurrer is redolent of an understated courtesy that would not be out of place in a Ciceronian letter. But we should keep in mind the legal language of self-vindication and self-possession (*vindicare, iniecerere*) we have seen elsewhere in the collection as we continue reading: “But of whatever quality they are, read them thus, as if I am still seeking what is true, and seeking it fiercely, not as if I know it. For I have not enslaved myself to anyone. I bear the name of no man. I entrust much to the judgment of great men, and yet I claim something for my own.” (*Sed qualescumque sunt, tu illos sic lege tamquam verum quaeram adhuc, non sciam, et contumaciter quaeram. Non enim me cuiquam emancipavi, nullius nomen fero; multum magnorum virorum iudicio credo, aliquid et meo vindico, Ep. 45.4.*) The vocabulary Seneca uses to direct his reader is vividly figurative. Not only the verb *emancipavi* but also the clause that follows it (“nullius nomen fero”), meaning, “I have not been branded or tattooed with my owner’s name,” suggest that a writer whose style is smoothed by her facile adoption of others’ thoughts as her own is little better than a slave. If Seneca’s style seems rough, as *contumaciter* suggests, it may be ascribed to the difficulty of Seneca’s task and his insistence on pursuing it independently, refusing to risk indebteding himself to other thinkers. The verb *vindico* further stresses that Seneca’s work pursues mastery, rather than acceptance. By the end of Letter 45, a reader may have forgotten the pleasantries with which Seneca greeted Lucilius’s request for his books. The last sentence, however, reinstates a conventional epistolary frame: “But let me not overstep the limits of a letter, which ought not fill up the reader’s left hand.” (*Sed ne epistolae modum excedam, quae non debet sinistram manum legis implere, 45.13.*)³³



Letter 46 comments on Seneca's reception of a book by Lucilius. Seneca does not explicitly declare that, with this book, Lucilius has made a return for the gift of those books of Seneca's that Letter 45 discusses, yet the juxtaposition of the two letters makes this a natural inference (cf. *Fam.* 15.20 and 15.21). On the other hand, when we read Letter 46 immediately after 45, they seem remarkably inconsistent. In Letter 45 Seneca sets rigorous standards for his own work, privileging matter over manner and independence over elegance. At the center of the letter is his call to the practicing philosopher to focus not on semantic subtleties but on matters of substance. Both aspects of Letter 45 appear to conflict sharply with his praise in Letter 46, in which he comments almost exclusively on Lucilius's style. About the work's content, he says merely, "It made a contribution too" (*Fecit aliquid et materia*, 46.2). However, closer attention to the way Seneca describes Lucilius's style goes a long way toward resolving the conflict between the letters: "What wit and spirit that [book] of yours had! I would say 'what passion!' if it had contained quiet passages, or had roused itself only at intervals. As it was, there was not passion but uniformity. The composition is manly and pure. Nonetheless, something sweet and smooth occasionally came in. You are powerful and upright. I want you to keep on in this manner, to proceed in the same way." (*Quid ingenii iste habuit, quid animi! Dicerem "quid impetus!", si interquievisset, si <ex> intervallo surrexisset; nunc non fuit impetus sed tenor. Compositio virilis et sancta; nihilominus interveniebat dulce illud et loco lene. Grandis, erectus es: hoc te volo tenere, sic ire*, 46.2).

The qualities that Seneca attributes to Lucilius's book are more usually found in persons.³⁴ Certainly *ingenium* and *animus* are properties of persons, and the adjectives *virilis* and *sancta* signal strong approbation.³⁵ *Iste* also contributes to the personification of the book; it might easily refer to a slave or freedman of Lucilius.³⁶ For a few moments, Lucilius's book impersonates a third participant in the exchange, like Cicero's *Orator* (*Fam.* 15.20) or the four books of *De Academica* that he sends to Varro as collection agents (*Fam.* 9.8). Lucilius's book resembles a protégé, sent to Seneca for approval and advancement. By praising the book, Seneca advertises both the protégé and his promoter, who is in this case his author. Seneca subtly renews a conceit of Ciceronian correspondence, and at the same time knocks his reader off balance, by praising the style of Lucilius's book apart from its content in a letter that follows directly on the exhortations of Letter 45 to resist the distractions of style.³⁷

Yet a further complication arises from Seneca's last compliment, which shifts from the third person to the second: "Grandis, erectus es." Suddenly, Lucilius is identified directly with his work: "You are upright and powerful." The resultant ambiguity is of a piece with the pattern established in earlier

letters: Seneca suggests one direction, only to tack immediately in another. First Lucilius appears as the patron of his work; a moment later, he is identified directly with the work, as though he and it are inseparable. Seneca may also suggest a point he makes elsewhere more directly and at greater length—namely, the style is the man.³⁸ *Grandis* and *erectus* may indicate moral attributes as well as physical ones, in which case the apparent difference between style and substance, and even person and text, can be easily swept away. Then the apparent error of commenting exclusively on the style of Lucilius's book can be recuperated as, in fact, a comment on his character.

Raising texts to the status of persons remains a rhetorical novelty in Cicero's correspondence, one playful euphemistic tactic among many. In Seneca's letter collection, however, the combination of personification and exemplary discourse featuring "Seneca" now as teacher, now as student, becomes a central strategy. Only if the text can impersonate a friend's presence completely, and a lesson by example can supplant experience entirely, can a purely epistolary friendship suffice as a complete friendship. Text must be taken to be equivalent to a person. And when text becomes a virtual person, then the self that resides in the body, the Seneca or Lucilius who lives and dies at the whim of fortune or a more powerful person's sufferance, gains by transference into text a kind of invulnerability, stability, and immortality.

The collection of letters to Lucilius is a textbook and workbook for the art of living. It also supports its author's considerable literary ambition and his wish for permanent personal fame. By requiring the reader to question constantly her expectations and assumptions about what kind of text she is reading, whom it addresses, what the relationship of reader and writer is, and what register of reality it expresses, the *Moral Epistles* encourage their readers to become ever more wary of appearances, more attuned to the paradoxes inherent in orthodox ways of speech, thought, and practice, and more willing to question or reject those paradoxes in favor of understandings that are less conventional, but to which they have been led by personal experience, as active readers. One lesson Seneca's letters set for us is that we must construct ourselves for ourselves, and we must maintain this construction for the duration of our lives. The philosophical imperative for constant self-construction might not strictly necessitate the production of texts to record and enact the aspirant philosopher's progress, but for as astute an heir of Cicero as Seneca was, the communication and commemoration of the self in text could aspire to the kind of honorable public visibility that required visible political engagement in Cicero's time. In the *Moral Epistles*, Seneca seeks to distinguish a self that is decoupled from social status, accomplishments, and duties. Yet his revolutionary project is undertaken with discretion. The wholesale devaluation of these external, social,



intersubjective practices of individual identity might well jeopardize a Roman reader's traditional means of construing and evaluating himself and others, not only as successes or failures, but even as comprehensible persons. It is ironic, and entirely characteristic of Seneca, that he makes use of familiar correspondence, a form that in Cicero's milieu was the chief substitute for face-to face social interaction, both to repeatedly decry the social basis of personal identity and the mechanisms by which such identity is promoted and, simultaneously, to produce an imperishable identity for himself. L. Annaeus Seneca the man is lost, but as we read the letters, "Seneca" emerges time and time again.

8



CONSOLATION AND COMMUNITY

Seneca composed several prose consolations long before embarking on the *Moral Epistles*.¹ His consolation for Marcia on the death of her adult son is his earliest extant work. It was followed by two consolations written during his eight years of exile on Corsica. The first of these was addressed to Polybius, an imperial freedman who would have the emperor's ear.² The second was for his mother, Helvia. In this work, innovatively, Seneca consoles his mother for her loss of him.³ All three consolations amply show Seneca willing and able to adapt the tropes of consolation to meet his own personal, political, and philosophical ends. In the *Moral Epistles*, his use of epistolary consolation is equally savvy. Because the letter of consolation was an immediately recognizable epistolary type, strongly marked by formal, rhetorical, and social conventions, and because the practice of providing consolation was a duty of Roman *amicitia*, consolation provides an excellent vehicle for Seneca to revisit the definition of true friendship, removed from social transactions, that he has advanced in the earlier books of the collection. Moreover, since the responses to death that letters of consolation advocate were ostensibly dictated by philosophy, but proper deportment in bereavement was in fact governed by social convention, Seneca's inclusion of epistolary consolation within his overtly philosophical correspondence with Lucilius provides an opportunity to differentiate a genuine philosophical response to death from one that is merely conventional, stemming from courtesy rather than conviction. At the same time, by the inclusion of consolatory letters in the *Moral Epistles*, Seneca demonstrates his willingness to make use of familiar instruments of socially embedded *amicitia* for both critical



and protreptic ends, just as he did by including the literary exchange that Letters 45 and 46 enact. And, of course, death tests philosophical convictions. The death of a friend is a natural occasion for considering one's own mortality, a meditation that becomes more intimate and more complex as we contemplate afresh the idea that a true friend is another self. Finally, Seneca's letter of consolation illustrates simultaneously what the gift exchange of correspondence looks like when it is rendered in terms of self-contained interiority and how even this most internally directed correspondence creates and sustains community, so that the gift it offers continues to exist because it continues to circulate and increase.

The Lead-up

Previous chapters have demonstrated that Seneca often uses the concluding sentences of individual epistles to dramatically punctuate his collection. The end of a letter is a natural opportunity for summary, of course, but often Seneca uses the last words of a letter to take a surprising turn, leaving his reader bemused rather than satisfied. Moreover, the disjunction between one letter and the next provides a gap that creates emphasis and contrast on either side. Book openings and endings can have the same amplifying power. Three of the last five letters of Book 6 end with comments about death (*Ep.* 58.37, 60.4, 61.4). These remarks pave the way for Letter 63, the first letter of Book 7, which constitutes a climax of sorts.⁴ A consolation to Lucilius on the death of his friend Flaccus, it unites two major themes of the collection—friendship and death—and also powerfully combines two modes of discourse, the exemplary and the epistolary.

This conjunction of themes and modes has been a long time coming. Three-quarters of the way through Letter 19, Seneca imagines that Lucilius has become convinced of the advisability of withdrawing from public life. Uncertain how to proceed, he asks, “How may I make my exit?” (*Quomodo . . . exibo*, 19.8)? Within its immediate context, Lucilius's question is straightforward: how may a person encumbered by obligations withdraw from a public career? As we read further into the collection, however, the verb *exire* casts an increasingly long shadow, until in Letter 61 we read, “I write the present letter to you . . . as if death were about to call me away in the very act of writing. I am prepared to make my exit.” (*tibi hanc epistulam scribo, tamquam me cum maxime scribentem mors evocatura sit; paratus exire sum*, 61.2.) At the end of the collection's first book, Seneca mentions with approval taking one's own life as a means of conquering necessity (12.10).⁵ However, the suggestion that honorable withdrawal from political life is a prelude to honorable withdrawal from life itself

emerges more gradually and subtly. Letter 30, which recounts the honorable approach to death taken by Aufidius Bassus, does not make the resemblance of Bassus to Seneca explicit. However, the joking end of the letter does imply a parallel between Bassus's conversational practice and Seneca's epistolary practice: "But I ought to be afraid that you will hate such a long letter worse than death. And so I make an ending. But as for you, think about death constantly, so that you may never fear it." (*Sed vereri debeo ne tam longas epistulas peius quam mortem oderis. Itaque finem faciam: tu tamen mortem ut numquam timeas semper cogita*, 30.18.) Both are self-consciously "making an end" (*finem facere*), although Bassus does so by means of conversation, Seneca by letters. With this parallel in mind, we can better evaluate the larger parallel that Seneca implies, looking back to his description of Bassus's efforts to console his friends: "Our Bassus seemed to attend his own funeral, to lay out his own corpse for burial, to go on living as if he were his own survivor, wisely bearing the loss of himself." (*Bassus noster videbatur mihi prosequi se et componere et vivere tamquam superstes sibi et sapienter ferre desiderium sui*, 30.5.) In his letters, Seneca adopts the same position.

The concluding sentence of Letter 58 harks back to the Aufidius Bassus letter in both its joking tone and its theme. The bulk of this letter has been taken up with a discussion of being (*to on* or *quod est*), and the relationship between Platonic and Stoic ontology.⁶ But the final sections (58.32–36) segue into a discussion of death, particularly the preferability of ending one's own life to overliving in a body made miserable by the depredations of extreme age.⁷ The final sentence (58.37) emphasizes this theme, while also reminding us that we are reading a letter by repeating *vale*, the typical epistolary closure: "But I have been digressing (or dying) for a long time. Nonetheless, material remains beyond what is possible to consider in one day, and how should one who is not able to end a letter impose an end on life? Therefore, farewell. You will read that more gladly than undiluted talk of death. Farewell." (*Sed in longum exeo; est praeterea materia quae ducere diem possit: et quomodo finem inponere vitae poterit qui epistulae non potest? Vale ergo: quod libentius quam mortes meras lecturus es. Vale.*)⁸

Not coincidentally, the phrase "to impose an end" occurs again in the opening lines of Letter 61: "Let us cease to wish for what we have wished in the past. Certainly I am practicing that I may not wish as an old man for what I wanted as a boy. In this one effort my days and my nights are spent—this is my work, this is my thought—to put an end to old evils." (*Desinamus quod volumus velle. Ego certe id ago <ne> senex eadem velim quae puer volui. In hoc unum eunt dies, in hoc noctes, hoc opus meum est, haec cogitatio, inponere veteribus malis finem*, 61.1.) Of course, the letters have repeatedly testified that living



emancipated from ambition, hope, and even necessity, living what Seneca calls in Letter 32 the *vita peracta* (32.5), is his goal. When Seneca compares ending a letter (*finem facere*) to ending his life (*inponere. . . finem*), humor arises from the incongruity of these two tasks: ending a letter is a small thing, ending a life seems momentous. But, as is typical for Seneca, joking reveals an irony: the incongruous scope of the two tasks is only apparent. Ending a life is a small thing, too, if properly apprehended.⁹

Letter 59 does not engage directly with preparedness for death, but the metaphor Seneca uses to describe people who have confused sensual pleasure with true happiness reverses the self-survival practiced by Aufidius Bassus. Instead of paradoxically surviving themselves by meditating on death and consoling their friends, habitual pleasure-seekers experience a form of living death. They rot from the inside out, seeking indulgences that fill their living bodies with pus (*suppurare*, 59.17). At the conclusion of this letter, Seneca comes back to the distinction between pleasure (*voluptas*), which an ordinary person may experience, and joy (*gaudium*), which is known only by the wise person and the gods: "Those who live for sensual pleasure spend every night among false joys, and, indeed, they carry on as if every night were their last." (*Omnem luxuriosi noctem inter falsa gaudia et quidem tamquam supremam agunt*, 59.18.) These unfortunate souls present a mirror image of the aspiring wise person: he also lives every day as though it may be his last, or indeed, as though his life were already complete (*peracta*), but philosophy leads him away from bodily indulgence. At the end of Letter 60, Seneca mentions another unphilosophical group of the living dead. These persons may appear to share in an aspect of the philosophical life—that is, living in tranquil retirement from society—but their values actually are antithetical to those of the honorable person: "He who is useful to many people really lives, he really lives who is useful to himself. However, those who hide out idly in their houses are virtually buried already. For these men, their names might as well be inscribed on their marble doorsills: they have predeceased their own death." (*Vivit is qui multis usui est, vivit is qui se utitur; qui vero latitant et torpent sic in domo sunt quomodo in conditivo. Horum licet in limine ipso nomen marmori inscribas: mortem suam antecesserunt*, 60.4.)

These concluding passages from Letters 59 and 60 mark the opposite of philosophically minded men like Bassus, who console their friends for their death while still living and who, though living a quiet life, nonetheless act as moral exemplars for those in their immediate circle, as well as those who hear of their virtuous practices at some remove. Moreover, these anonymous idlers and nocturnal pleasure-seekers recall an earlier, named exemplar, the notorious Pacuvius who featured in Letter 12, a man who supposedly celebrated a daily

funeral banquet in his own honor (12.8–9). Pacuvius enacts the negative, decadent version of a practice with a positive corollary, which Seneca urges Lucilius to imitate—nightly declaring ourselves to have come to the end of our lives, for “whoever says ‘I have lived’ on a daily basis rises the next day to pure profit” (quisquis dixit “vixi” cotidie ad lucrum surgit, 12.9).¹⁰ At the beginning of Letter 61, Seneca declares his effort to live every day as though it is his last (61.1), and at the end of the letter, he declares himself ready to die (Vixi, Lucili carissime, quantum satis erat; mortem plenus expecto, 61.4). And yet, having made an end of life does not entail physical death. After all, the excellent Aufidius Bassus lives on as if he has survived his death (*Ep.* 30.5). The wise person lives in a state of continual preparedness for death, but it is the preparedness, rather than death itself, that matters.

By the beginning of Letter 62, Seneca’s disentanglement not only from social and political affairs, but also from the constraints of place and occasion, seems complete: “wherever I am, there I am my own” (ubicumque sum, ibi meus sum, 62.1). This letter ends with a lesson on wealth learned from the Cynic philosopher Demetrius: “Our Demetrius, moreover, lived in this way—not as if he scorned all things, but as if he conceded them to be held by others.” (Demetrius autem noster sic vivit, non tamquam contempserit omnia, sed tamquam aliis habenda permiserit, 62.3.) The appearance of *noster* Demetrius here at the end of Book 6, apparently rounding off a series of letters that have been concerned with death and dying well, may be by design. According to Plutarch, Cato the Younger ended his life with a philosopher named Demetrius in attendance (*Cat. Min.* 69.1). In Tacitus’s account of the death of Thræsea Paetus, he was engrossed in philosophical conversation with the same Demetrius whom Seneca refers to in Letter 62 when the order came from Nero for his suicide (*Ann.* 16.34).¹¹ The presence of Demetrius here in the *Moral Epistles* may well herald a philosophical death. But whose death is it? An analysis of the way that Seneca uses Letter 63 to exploit and critique the conventions of epistolary consolation as exemplified by Cicero will better prepare us to answer the question of whose death is commemorated, or anticipated, by Letter 63, and whose grief is assuaged.

Comparing Condolences

Given Seneca’s sometimes subtle and occasionally pointed emulation of Ciceronian correspondence elsewhere in the *Moral Epistles*, superadded to the conventional qualities of epistolary consolation, we expect to find rhetorical tactics and tropes shared between Cicero’s consolatory letters and Letter 63. A close reading of the letter does reveal resemblances, but it also enables us to better



appreciate how Seneca departs from expected forms of epistolary condolence. The letter opens:

Molestē fero decessisse Flaccum, amicum tuum, plus tamen aequo dolere te nolo. Illud, ut non doleas, vix audebo exigere; et esse melius scio. Sed cui ista firmitas animi continget nisi iam multum supra fortunam elato? illum quoque ista res vellicabit, sed tantum vellicabit. Nobis autem ignosci potest prolapsis ad lacrimas, si non nimiae decurrerunt, si ipsi illas repressimus. Nec sicci sint oculi amisso amico nec fluant; lacrimandum est, non plorandum. (*Ep.* 63.1)

I was distressed to hear of your friend Flaccus's death, yet I wish you will not grieve more than moderately. That you not grieve at all, I scarcely dare to demand, and yet I know that would be better. But for whom does that strength of mind obtain except he who is already lifted far above fortune? This business will prick at him also, but will only prick. Moreover, we may be forgiven for slipping toward tears if they do not run down excessively, if we ourselves constrain them. When a friend has been lost, neither should our eyes be dry nor should they flow with tears; the event should be wept but not bewailed.

Grief, rather than its inspiration, is the initial focus of the letter, and Seneca puts the emphasis on his own reaction to Flaccus's death rather than on that of Lucilius. To judge from the letters of consolation preserved in Cicero's corpus, it is not unusual to proclaim one's own grief before addressing that of one's addressee. However, Cicero (*Fam.* 5.16) and Servius (*Fam.* 4.5) both stress the *shared* distress of author and addressee in their opening lines, which Seneca does not. However, the word order, neatly enclosing "that he has died, Flaccus, your friend" (decessisse Flaccum, amicum) between the first-person verb *fero* and the possessive adjective *tuum* telegraphs in the briefest form the idea that Seneca and Lucilius's pain is held in common. Seneca's second move, advising Lucilius not to grieve beyond measure, is also conventional advice conventionally placed, although, again, Seneca's extreme brevity contrasts with the amplitude of the Ciceronian consolation.

A more significant departure from the norms of Ciceronian consolation is Seneca's failure to draw attention to his absence from Lucilius in his bereavement. Both apologizing for one's absence and expressing a desire to be present appear to have been conventional at the opening of consolatory letters. Their omission here could be due to the extreme economy of Seneca's opening, but it might also be ascribed to the perfect sufficiency of letters, or imaginative thought spurred by letters, for carrying on a philosophical friendship. In Letter 63 Seneca adds that to lament the absence of a friend, whether in death or on a journey, is to construe wrongly the favor of fortune.¹²

Fac ergo, mi Lucili, quod aequitatem tuam decet, desine beneficium fortunae male interpretari: abstulit, sed dedit. Ideo amicis avide fruamur quia quamdiu contingere hoc possit incertum est. Cogitemus quam saepe illos reliquerimus in aliquam peregrinationem longinquam exituri, quam saepe eodem morantes loco non viderimus: intellegemus plus nos temporis in vivis perdidisse. (*Ep.* 63.7–8)

Therefore, my Lucilius, do what befits your equanimity; cease to put a wrong construction on a benefit of fortune. He has been removed, but he was given. For this reason, since it is impossible to know how long we will have them, let us eagerly enjoy our friends. Let us think how often we, about to go out on some extensive journey, have left them behind, how often we have not seen them although we were staying in the same place: let us understand that we have lost more time among our living friends.

Seneca points out a contradiction between common perception and reality. The particular example he uses, of time lost from companionship with our living friends, strongly recalls in more compressed form a passage from Letter 55, which advises Lucilius to erase by the power of thought the distance that separates him from Seneca:

Quare non est quod existimes ideo parum bene compositum esse te quod in Campania non es. Quare autem non es? huc usque cogitationes tuas mitte. Conversari cum amicis absentibus licet, et quidem quotiens velis, quamdiu velis. Magis hac voluptate, quae maxima est, fruimur dum absumus; praesentia enim nos delicatos facit, et quia aliquando una loquimur, ambulamus, consedimus, cum diducti sumus nihil de iis quos modo vidimus cogitamus. Et ideo aequo animo ferre debemus absentiam, quia nemo non multum etiam praesentibus abest. (*Ep.* 55.8–10)

What reason is there for you to think you are out of sorts because you are not in Campania? And why are you not? Send your thoughts right here. We may talk with absent friends, indeed, as often as we wish and for as long as we wish, and we enjoy this pleasure, which is the greatest of all, more when we are absent from one another. Presence spoils us, and since sometimes we talk, walk, and sit together, when we have parted we think not at all about those whom we have just seen. And so for this reason we ought to bear absence with a mind undisturbed, since no one is not absent much of the time even when he is physically present.

The argument that we ought not miss our lost friends now, given that their absence was not a cause for pain when we were apart from them in life, is advanced as a consolation in Letter 63. The same point in Letter 55 serves as



an argument for not lamenting separation from friends still among the living, because the most enjoyable conversation takes place in thought, or perhaps through letters. Reading the two passages together, we may conclude that a deceased friend may as well be a recipient of thoughtful letters, or at least fond thoughts, as a living one, and that perhaps the converse is also true: finding and reading a cache of letters from a deceased friend could afford as much pleasure, and confer as much benefit, as an ongoing correspondence with a living friend.

The occurrence of *frui*mur (“we enjoy [conversation with absent friends],” *Ep.* 55.9) in one passage and *fruamur* (“let us enjoy [our friends]”) in the other recalls the frequent incidence of similar words in Cicero’s epistolary declarations about friendship, particularly his assertion that “the benefit (*fructum*) of friendship is friendship itself” (*Fam.* 3.13.2 [76]). But Seneca’s formulations challenge the ideal of balanced reciprocity that shapes Cicero’s epistolary rhetoric of friendship. An even exchange of material favors, or of intangible but often even more valuable demonstrations and expressions of esteem, is impossible when one partner dies. But if the whole practice of *amicitia* is transferred from the realm of social actions to that of rhetoric and metaphor, then exchanges need no longer be literally reciprocal to be made to balance. In Seneca’s version of friendship, the memory of the dead will continue to have value and meaning among the living, and the memory of the dead friend is seen as still contributing. In Letter 99, a consolation to Marullus sent as an enclosure with a covering note to Lucilius, Seneca writes, “A person defines enjoyment (or benefit, or profit) narrowly who is gladdened only by the present. Both the future and the past may delight us, the one by anticipation, the other by memory.” (*Anguste fructus rerum determinat, qui tantum praesentibus laetus est: et futura et praeterita delectant, haec exspectatione, illa memoria, 99.5.*) For Seneca, a deceased friend may still provide a rich exemplum and a profoundly revealing sounding board, measuring rod, or mirror.

Conceiving of friends as the *beneficia fortunae*, as in Letter 63, evokes the friend as gift more subtly than was the case in Letter 35 (“*Adfer . . . te mihi, ingens munus,*” 35.3), and offers a critically different point of view. There, Seneca was concerned to make his addressee understand his capacity for self-determination and its moral significance: the only true friend will be an autonomous and self-declaring friend. Here and in Letter 99, Seneca is concerned with representing the capacity and duty of the recipient of friendship, rather than the giver, and he emphasizes what is not up to us—the vicissitudes of fortune—rather than what is. But the two views also have something important in common: a person who decides to give herself as a gift, a friend, has emancipated herself from the limitations of social rules that ordinarily dictate

the transactions of “friends.” Likewise, the friend who decides to continue as a recipient of and participant in friendship by continuing to enjoy a friend even after the friend’s death has emancipated herself from fortune, and in some measure from time.¹³

Reconfiguring Community

In Letter 63 Seneca comments critically on the accepted social forms for demonstrating grief, on conventional prescriptions for easing mourning, and on the mistaken values they represent. Comparison with Ciceronian consolation is again revealing. When Servius consoles Cicero, he invokes the public eye, quick to censure, as an incentive for maintaining at least the outward appearance of serene self-control. His concluding appeal is to Cicero’s concern for maintaining a consistent persona:

Plura me ad te de hac re scribere pudet, ne videar prudentiae tuae diffidere. Qua re, si hoc unum proposuero, finem faciam scribendi: vidimus aliquotiens secundam pulcherrime te ferre fortunam magnamque ex ea re te laudem apisci; fac aliquando intellegamus adversam quoque te aequae ferre posse neque id maius quam debeat tibi onus videri, ne ex omnibus virtutibus haec una tibi videatur deesse. (*Fam.* 4.5.6 [248])

I blush to write more to you on this subject, in case I might seem to distrust your good sense. So I will end my letter after I have made one last point: we have seen on several occasions how excellently you bear favorable fortune and the great praise that you garner thereby; act now so that we may understand that you are also able to bear adversity with equanimity, and that it seems no greater burden to you than it ought, lest out of all the virtues you seem to lack this one alone.

The importance of public appearances occurs elsewhere in Ciceronian consolations as well. In an earlier, political consolation to Servius, Cicero reassures him that “your virtue . . . shines out like a lamp” (quasi lumen aliquod . . . elucere sanctitatem, *Fam.* 4.3.2 [202]), and to Brutus, bereaved, he writes, “Now you must serve the people and the stage, as they say.” ([T]ibi nunc populo et scaenae, ut dicitur, serviendum est, *Brut.* 17.2 [18].) In Cicero’s consolations, maintaining the appearance of public self-control may be represented as a more or less evil necessity, as it is here to Brutus, and occasionally, as is implied in Servius’s closing lines and made explicit in Cicero’s letter of reply (*Fam.* 4.6 [249]), as the potential silver lining of a grim situation: fathers bereaved during periods of high public visibility at least stand to gain glory for their fortitude.¹⁴



According to Seneca in Letter 63, however, for a mourner to solicit the public eye is disgraceful. Yet even those bereaved persons who mourn modestly will be hard put not to react self-consciously when they are subjected to the public gaze. For anyone but the wise person, being seen grieving is liable both to provoke an unwarranted sense of self-importance and to distort, by exaggeration, the evaluation of a loss. The necessity for mourning in public never constitutes an opportunity for the bereaved, as it may according to Cicero, but instead always presents a moral hazard:

Quaeris unde sint lamentationes, unde inmodici fletus? per lacrimas argumenta desiderii quaerimus et dolorem non sequimur sed ostendimus; nemo tristis sibi est. O infelicem stultitiam! est aliqua et doloris ambitio. (*Ep.* 63.2)

Annum feminis ad lugendum constituere maiores, non ut tam diu lugerent, sed ne diutius: viris nullum legitimum tempus est, quia nullum honestum. Quam tamen mihi ex illis mulierculis dabis vix retractis a rogo, vix a cadavere revulsis, cui lacrimae in totum mensem duraverint? Nulla res citius in odium venit quam dolor, qui recens consolatorem invenit et aliquos ad se adducit, inveteratus vero deridetur, nec inmerito; aut enim simulatus aut stultus est. (*Ep.* 63.13)

Where does weeping come from, from what source do excessive tears arise? We seek proof of our longing through tears, and instead of following our grief, we show it forth. No one is sad for himself.¹⁵ Unhappy foolishness! There is ambition even in grief.

Our ancestors laid down one year as the period of mourning for women, not so that they might mourn for that long, but so that they would mourn no longer. For men, no set period was established, since none was honorable. Yet among these little ladies freshly dragged from the bier, freshly torn away from the corpse of their beloved, can you give me an example of one whose tears lasted so much as a whole month? Nothing becomes a matter for ill will more quickly than grief. The newly bereaved finds a consoler and leads others to himself, but one who mourns for an extended time is ridiculed, and not undeservedly; for he is either pretending or a fool.

In Ciceronian consolation, the community—the public eye—that validates proper forms, appearances, and duration of mourning is generally represented in a positive light. In contrast, Seneca views the public and the public sphere as corrupt, and corrupting. However, his criticism of the evaluation of behavior by the community should be taken not as a rejection of community *per se*, but of the values he attributes to the undifferentiated mass of the public, the crowd. James Ker has noted that Seneca's epistolary treatment of grief reintegrates

its addressee “not into broader society [as Ciceronian consolation does], but into the community of [Senecan] *amicitia*.”¹⁶ At many points Seneca proposes replacing received forms of community with better ones, intentionally selected to give and receive aid in becoming wise. In Letter 29, which concerns Seneca’s attempts to convert a mutual friend, Marcellinus, to a steady commitment to philosophy, he writes, “Wisdom is an art: it should seek a sure goal, it should choose those people who are about to make progress, it should withdraw from those whom it despairs of helping.” (*Sapientia ars est: certum petat, eligat profecturos, ab iis quos desperavit recedat*, 29.3.) Letter 6 extols the benefits of constant companionship with those who may model philosophy for us (6.5), and Letter 11 also recommends mentors whom we can summon to mind as needed, by whose imagined reactions we may guide our behavior (11.8–10). At the close of Letter 7, Seneca suggests that a sufficient community may exist within very narrow bounds indeed:

Democritus ait, “unus mihi pro populo est, et populus pro uno.” Bene et ille, quisquis fuit (ambigitur enim de auctore), cum quaeretur ab illo quo tanta diligentia artis spectaret ad paucissimos perventurae, “satis sunt” inquit “mihi pauci, satis est unus, satis est nullus.” Egregie hoc tertium Epicurus, cum uni ex consortibus studiorum suorum scriberet: “haec” inquit “ego non multis, sed tibi; satis enim magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus.” (*Ep.* 7.11)

Democritus said, “One is a crowd for me, and a crowd is like one person.” That was well said, as were the words of that man, whoever he was (for the author is not clearly known), who, when asked by a person what he looked for in pursuing with such great care an art that would reach so few, said, “The few are enough for me, one is enough, none is enough.” And with this, a third instance—Epicurus wrote nobly when to one of those with whom he corresponded he said, “I write these words not to many, but to you, for we are a great enough theater, one for another.”

Seneca’s adoption of Democritus and Epicurus as fellow thinkers who have recognized and endorsed the sort of selectivity he recommends implies a tactic for community building that he elaborates in Letter 52—namely, constructing a roster of assistance from among the ancient philosophers, as well as those who are still living: “And thus as we fight, let us call for aid from others. . . . Not only those who are may help us, but those who were.” (*Itaque pugnemus, aliquorum invocemus auxilium. . . . adiuvare nos possunt non tantum qui sunt, sed qui fuerunt*, 52.7.) The extended depictions of Aufidius Bassus’s and Tullius Marcellinus’s endeavors to die well emphasize the fact that they are dying not in solitude, but in conversation, surrounded by friends.¹⁷ Nor is mourning



understood to be a properly solitary act. In cases of a prolonged death, mourning for a friend can be at least partially forestalled by conversation about the causes of and remedies for grief in his company, and the company of others, before the event. Meditation on the same topics, whether internally, by conversation, or by letter, will prepare us even for unexpected deaths. So, too, thinking about the nature of friendship will reveal the truth of what Cicero makes Laelius say: “[Through friendship,] the absent are present, and needy persons have abundance, and invalids are strong, and—what is even more difficult to articulate—the dead are alive.” (et absentes adsunt, et egentes abundant, et imbecilli valent, et quod difficiliter dictu est, mortui vivunt, *Amic.* 23.) There is no reason to think that Cicero had the Stoic doctrine specifically in mind when he assigned Laelius this beautiful and difficult assertion, but the idea of a mutually sustaining community of wise persons may well have informed Seneca’s advice on the cessation of grief.¹⁸

Near the beginning of Letter 63, Seneca recommends a moderate expression of grief: “Neither should our eyes be dry, nor should they flow, because we have lost a friend.” (Nec sicci sint oculi amisso amico nec fluant, 63.1.) Later, Seneca’s advice takes a more stringent turn. The remedy for the loss of a friend is to seek comfort in the friends we still possess, and to replace the friend we have lost.

Si habemus alios amicos, male de iis et meremur et existimamus, qui parum valent in unius elati solacium; si non habemus, maiorem iniuriam ipsi nobis fecimus quam a fortuna accepimus: illa unum abstulit, nos quemcumque non fecimus. Deinde ne unum quidem nimis amavit qui plus quam unum amare non potuit. Si quis despoliatus amissa unica tunica conplorare se malit quam circumspicere quomodo frigus effugiat et aliquid inveniat quo tegat scapulas, nonne tibi videatur stultissimus? Quem amabas extulisti: quaere quem ames. Satis est amicum reparare quam flere. (*Ep.* 63.10–11)

If we have other friends, we deserve badly of them and we value them poorly, if we count them as inadequate solace for the one who has been removed. If we don’t have other friends, we have done ourselves a greater injury than we have received from fortune: she took away one, but we have not made any number of others. Moreover, he loves not even one person too well who is not able to love more than one. If anyone who has lost his only coat prefers to bewail himself rather than look around for how he may escape the cold, and for something with which to cover his bare back, wouldn’t he seem a great fool to you? You have buried someone you loved; look for someone you may love. It is better to replace a friend than to weep.

Here, Seneca counsels the aspiring Stoic who is bereaved to take the same attitude and actions that he ascribed to the wise man who has lost a friend, in Letter 9. That letter seemed to suggest that the wise person will value friendship itself over individual friends (*Ep.* 9.5). Thus, he will bear the deaths of individual friends easily because the idea of friendship remains intact. Alternatively, Letter 9 also seems to suggest that the value of friendship lies in the integrity of a harmonious community of friends, a conception that need not exclude value being placed on individual friends, but that will still mean that the loss of any individual can be sustained without diminishing the harmony of the community as a whole (9.3–4). Letter 109 complements this picture of friendship among the wise, assuring Lucilius that wise men help each other, delight in one another, and are intimately connected to one another.¹⁹ Neither Letter 9 nor Letter 109 addresses the role of memory among the community of friends, whether they are wise already or whether, as is far more likely, they aspire to become wise. Both Letter 63 and the consolation to Marullus in Letter 99, however, contain some indication that Seneca's substitution of a small, deliberately selected community in place of evaluation in the public eye and scrutiny by "friends" will bring among its benefits shared memory of its members as a remedy for loss.

In Letter 99, Seneca describes where conventionally thinking people go wrong, mistaking gains, the *beneficia fortunae*, for losses.

Sed plerique non computant quanta perceperint, quantum gavisi sint. Hoc habet inter reliqua mali dolor iste: non supervacuum tantum sed ingratus est. Ergo quod habuisti talem amicum, perit opera? Tot annis, tanta coniunctione vitae, tam familiari studiorum societate nil actum est? Cum amico effers amicitiam? Et quid doles amisisse, si habuisse non prodest? Mihi crede, magna pars ex iis quos amavimus, licet ipsos casus abstulerit, apud nos manet; nostrum est quod praeterit tempus nec quicquam est loco tutiore quam quod fuit. Ingrati adversus percepta spe futuri sumus, quasi non quod futurum est, si modo successerit nobis, cito in praeterita transitorium sit. (*Ep.* 99.4)

But most bereaved friends do not calculate how much they have received, how much they have rejoiced. And so among other harmful qualities, this grief of yours is not only useless, but also ungrateful. As for the fact that you have possessed such a friend, has the whole enterprise collapsed? Was nothing accomplished by so many years, so close an intimacy, such a close association of pursuits? Do you bury friendship along with your friend? If so, why do you grieve for what is lost, when it did not benefit you to have it? Believe me, even when chance has removed their persons, the greatest part of those whom we have



loved remains with us. The time that has passed by is ours, and there is no safer place than what has been. We are ungrateful for what we have received because of hope for the future, as if the future, even if it should come to pass for us, will not quickly cross over into the past.

The store of memories built up over years may continue as a source of profit and delight, and so the death of a friend need not be the end of our friendship with him. Moreover, Letter 63 declares that the memory of a lost friend can and should be a source of unalloyed pleasure. Seneca claims that his memory of friends who have died is a pleasure entirely free of bitterness, “for I possessed them as though I were about to lose them, so I have lost them as though I possess them still” (*mihi amicorum defunctorum cogitatio dulcis ac blanda est; habui enim illos tamquam amissurus, amisi tamquam habeam*, 63.7).²⁰ Possession (*habui, habeam*) is key to Seneca’s declaration. Just as Stilbo was able to reassure his astonished captor Demetrius, “I have all my goods with me” (“omnia” inquit “bona mea mecum sunt,” *Ep.* 9.18), the friend who has not only seen in his friend a reflection of himself (as at *Cic. Amic.* 23) but also has taken possession of the heart and mind of his friend as though they were his own, will lose nothing by that friend’s departure.²¹ So a community of actual, individual friends may also continue undiminished by the death of one or more of its members, so long as the friends who survive continue to enjoy the company of the deceased through recounting his conversation and the example of his life, and, if he left a body of writing behind, through reading, discussing, and meditating on his words.²² Their commemoration makes the dead live (*mortui vivunt*). Moreover, by their writings and their example, the dead may continue as participants in friendship.

Exemplum and Meditatio

About halfway through his consolation to Cicero on the death of Tullia, Servius Sulpicius Rufus makes an example of himself. Viewing the once great cities of Greece as he sails by, returning to Italy from a term as governor of Asia, he recalls the small scale of his own concerns: “Do you not wish to restrain yourself, Servius, and to remember that you were born a mortal man?” (*visne tu te, Servi, cohibere et meminisse hominem te esse natum?* *Fam.* 4.5.5 [248]). By recounting this self-address within the letter to Cicero, Servius avails himself of the vividness of direct address while deflecting the force of advice his addressee might have experienced as humiliating, were it addressed directly to him. Similarly, near the end of his consolation to Lucilius, Seneca recalls his reaction to the death of a friend: “I write these words to you, I who wept for

Annaeus Serenus, dearest to me, so immoderately that I am among the exemplars of those whom distress conquered—a distinction I least desire.” (*Haec tibi scribo, is qui Annaeum Serenum carissimum mihi tam immodice flevi ut, quod minime velim, inter exempla sim eorum quos dolor vicit, Ep. 63.14.*) As Servius does, Seneca softens the force of his advice by casting himself as the person in need of a curb. Servius uses himself to exemplify both a failing and its correction within the single anecdote he recounts. Seneca does not say when he came to the realization that he should have been better prepared for his friend’s death, only that now, as of the writing of this consolation to Lucilius, he knows how he should have counseled himself all along: “Today I condemn my deed and I understand that the greatest cause for my mourning was that I had never thought that he could die before me.” (*Hodie tamen factum meum damno et intellego maximam mihi causam sic lugendi fuisse quod numquam cogitaveram mori eum ante me posse, 63.14.*)

Ostensibly, Seneca recounts his reaction to Annaeus Serenus’s death in order to urge Lucilius not to let grief take him by surprise. Now, Seneca writes, he takes care to remind himself of the unpredictability of fate. Death may arrive for anyone, at any time. Seniority is no guarantee of precedence in death. Much more than the terse opening sentence of the letter, Seneca’s confession of his grief for Serenus aligns him with his grieving addressee. In contrast to Ciceronian consolations, however, in which the writer and addressee are drawn together more closely by virtue of their commonly held object of grief, Seneca’s relationship with Flaccus, if he knew him at all, goes unmentioned. Seneca’s grief for Serenus makes his position parallel to that of Lucilius. What draws them closer together is not shared affection for a person. Instead, Seneca’s claim to being a legitimate consoler lies in his experience of grief. This experience, held in common with Lucilius, brings the two living friends closer together without requiring that Seneca claim a relationship with Flaccus. In this aspect, Seneca’s consolation diverges significantly from Ciceronian practice. On the other hand, this tactic may more effectively draw in the anonymous reader (not an aim of Ciceronian consolation), who also doesn’t know Flaccus, but may well have some acquaintance with grief.

What is curious about Seneca’s exemplary anecdote is the name of the younger, deceased friend. Seneca calls him Annaeus, which is of course Seneca’s own gentilician name. From the elder Pliny we learn that this Annaeus Serenus was prefect of Nero’s night watchmen, and that he died by eating poisoned mushrooms at a banquet (*HN 22.47.1*); according to Tacitus, he pretended to be the lover of Nero’s mistress Acte to shield the emperor’s activities from his jealous mother, possibly at Seneca’s behest (*Ann. 13.13*). Miriam Griffin suggests that we may assume that he was a Spaniard, and a distant relative, a protégé



of Seneca at court, but no detailed account of their connection survives that would help us judge whether family ties, the obligations of patronage, or simple mutual affection was its dominant element.²³ Seneca's admission that he was conquered by grief on the death of his friend may well strike us as the most empathetic moment in the letter, but it also turns the letter inward, toward self-reflection. The younger, deceased Annaeus Serenus mirrors his mortality to the Annaeus who is still alive and writing, L. Annaeus Seneca.²⁴ Further, this overlap of author and deceased may suggest to the reader of the *Moral Epistles* that we are in some sense witnesses, along with Demetrius the philosopher, to the death of Annaeus Seneca. Despite the name of Flaccus in its first line, it is Seneca's own death for which the letter chiefly consoles us.

Internalization and Expansion: The Increase of the Gift

In addition to foregrounding the self-reflexive, introspective aspects of Seneca's correspondence, the homonymy of Annaeus Seneca the writer and Annaeus Serenus the late lamented friend exacerbates Letter 63's divergence from the conventional agenda for a consolatory letter—namely, the reaffirmation of relationships among the living. It does more than diverge, though; rather, it implies an inversion of the gift exchange in which conventional correspondence participated. When Seneca invokes his own loss as an analogy to Lucilius's grief for Flaccus, he steps from the role of comforter into that of the bereaved and thus becomes the audience for his own advice. By then recalling the loss of a friend with the same name as himself, Seneca accomplishes the neat trick of occupying all three positions: the bereaved, the consoler, and also the departed.

In chapters 2 and 3, we saw that Ciceronian letters of consolation act as gifts. Seneca's consolation to Lucilius also operates as a gift, but a somewhat peculiar one. The exchange remains in a permanent state of suspension as the text awaits each new reader to step into Lucilius's place and make a counter-gift by reading, but it may also seem to be in danger of collapsing into solipsism by virtue of Seneca's monopolization of roles. Letter 63 not only extends consolation but also bears witness to an inwardly directed practice of consoling the self. Seneca shows us how gift exchange can be transmuted into introspection, and how it may be carried out internally, with the increase of the gift consisting simply in one's own deeper self-understanding. And yet this demonstration by Seneca is also a gift because we have read the other letters in the collection up to this point, such as his report of the conversations and behavior of Aufidius Bassus, and so we come to Letter 63 prepared to receive the exemplary lesson it presents. We have seen how Seneca's text aspires to extend the intimacy of a

philosophical correspondence to its anonymous reader, and how it can reproduce the power of a living example such as Bassus or Seneca himself to make him infinitely available for imitation by other partners in exchange. We have learned that the role of observer cannot be monopolized, and that an observer becomes a participant by responding to what she or he sees or reads. We are free to imitate the example of introspection that this letter and the collected letters to Lucilius provide, thus turning our initial acknowledgment and acceptance of this gift into a practice that will progressively deepen, becoming more meaningful and rewarding even as it continues to advertise the original gift.

The admonition “Fac ergo, mi Lucili,” midway through Letter 63 harks back to the first letter of the collection, where the same phrase introduces related advice:

In hoc enim fallimur, quod mortem prospicimus: magna pars eius iam praeterit; quidquid aetatis retro est mors tenet. Fac ergo, mi Lucili, quod facere te scribis, omnes horas conplectere; sic fiet ut minus ex crastino pendeas, si hodierno manum inieceris. (*Ep.* 1.2)

Insofar as we look ahead toward death, we are mistaken. The great part of death is already passed; death holds whatever part of our lifetime has gone by. And so, my Lucilius, do as you write that you are doing: embrace every hour. So may it be that you depend less on tomorrow, if you have taken possession of today.

When Seneca dramatically consigns the past to death in Letter 1, he is interested in dissuading his reader from wasting further time in, for example, remorse for time ill-spent. In Letter 63, the past is given a very different role, as a secure storehouse of memory that enables us indefinitely to replenish our friendship with the dead. Despite their different emphases, however, this intra-textual echo of Letter 1 in Letter 63 draws our attention to the cohesiveness and continuity of the *Moral Epistles*. Far from standing alone, Letter 63 engages themes that have exercised Seneca from the opening of his artfully constructed correspondence with Lucilius, and fully exploits the metaphorical matrix he has crafted to explore them. From our perspective, because Seneca has done his work so well, it may seem obvious that a letter of consolation should be a chief means for meditating on what Seneca took to be a central lesson of philosophy—that living well amounts to becoming prepared to die well, and, further, that he should use a letter, and this sort of letter, to console his friends, his readers, and himself for his own imminent death. The sheer success of this decision, in fact, may tend to obscure for us the remarkableness of repurposing a letter of consolation, a letter-type that was a staple of social status-marking and



exchange in Ciceronian correspondence, into an instrument for philosophical teaching and meditation.

Moreover, by using a letter of consolation to meditate on the lesson of his own death, Seneca draws attention to the consolatory function of the collection as a whole. The entire correspondence with Lucilius is also a correspondence with us, through which we readers may commemorate Seneca, learn from his example, and engage with him in conversation, so that our friendship with him, as improbable as it may seem, need never end. What Seneca says of reading the deceased Sextius in Letter 64—"he lives, he thrives, he is free, he is more than mortal, he sends me away full of great confidence" ("vivit, viget, liber est, supra hominem est, dimittit me plenum ingentis fiduciae," 64.3)—he may well have expected and hoped for us also to say whenever we, whoever we are, should rise from reading his own final work. We cannot reliably judge the success of Letter 63, or of the *Moral Epistles* as a whole, as a philosophical exercise for their author. On the other hand, almost two millennia after the composition of the *Moral Epistles*, we are in a fair position to judge the increase of Seneca's gift, which continues to circulate among responsive recipients. Seen this way, the question of the gift's continued liveliness becomes a question of reception. Our own reading and response to Seneca become part of the answer, and of the gift's increase.



NOTES

Introduction

1. For Roman epistolography before Cicero, see Cugusi 1983, 146–157. Earlier studies include Peter 1965 (originally 1901). On ancient Greek epistolography, see Rosenmeyer 2001, 19–35.

2. Dugan 2005 explores Cicero's textual self-fashioning in two speeches and the rhetorical works. On the evolving social role of written texts in late republican Rome, see Butler 2002, and on dedicated texts specifically, Stroup 2010.

3. Cicero's letters provide a better starting point for understanding ancient epistolary rhetoric and practice than the slender body of ancient epistolary theory, much of which appears to have been inferred from the letters of master practitioners, Cicero among them. For useful discussion and commentary on a judicious sample of theoretical passages, see Trapp 2003, 42–46, 316–326. A fuller collection is available in Malherbe 1988. For ancient epistolary theory in the history of rhetoric, from the perspective of scholars of rhetoric, see also Sullivan 2007; Poster 2007.

4. Malherbe 1988, 66–67, reproduces the complete list. Pseudo-Demetrius (not the same as the author of *On Style* quoted above) lists twenty-one kinds in the Hellenistic *Tupoi epistolikoi* (text and translation in Malherbe 1988, 30–41).

5. The phrase “allegedly separable” is taken from Trapp 2003, 41.

6. This understanding of correspondence is indebted to the preoccupations and occasionally to the terminology of linguistic pragmatics. Fitzmaurice 2002 on making and reading epistolary meaning has been particularly helpful to me. Other recent studies of Ciceronian correspondence with a pragmatic orientation include Hall 2009 and, to a somewhat lesser degree, White 2010.

7. For the history of the text of *Ad familiares*, see Shackleton Bailey 1977, 3–26. For *Ad Atticum*, see Shackleton Bailey 1965, 74–101. The manuscript traditions for *Ad Quintum* and *Ad Brutum* are the same as for the letters to Atticus.



8. For examples, see Beard 2002, 124–143. See also Leach 1999, which shows that *Fam.* 9 is constructed as a diptych in which each half reflects a distinct aspect of Cicero's carefully cultivated persona. Gunderson 2007, 2–7, critiques the way in which scholarship on the letters has dealt with (or more often ignored) the literary dimension of Cicero's letters, before turning to a specific instance of the richness of these texts: that is, the thematics of health in letters to Terentia (*Fam.* 14) and Tiro (*Fam.* 16).

9. *Fam.* 4.7–10 [230, 229, 231, 233] by Cicero, 4.11 [232] by Marcellus.

10. As noted also by White (2010, 54).

11. Shackleton Bailey (1965, 73) puts the publication of *Ad Atticum* in the middle of Nero's reign; *Ad familiares* within Tiro's lifetime. Nicholson 1998 surveys the scholarship; see also Setaioli 1976; Beard 2002; White 2010, 31–61.

12. For the dates of composition and publication, see Griffin 1992, 305, 348–350, 400, 418.

13. On the place of the *Moral Epistles* in Seneca's oeuvre and his plans for an additional, comprehensive *moralis philosophia*, see Leeman 1953; Russell 1974.

14. Too 1994.

15. See Mazzoli 1989, as well as Graver 1996, 13–24, for discussion of the history of scholarly opinion on the letters' "authenticity." Their essentially literary, and thus artificial or fictional nature is no longer controversial; see Griffin 1992, 416–419.

16. Habinek (1990, 184) remarks that the "technologies of the self" that Foucault and others have seen arising in the generations following Cicero "develop[ed] largely within the context of friendships."

17. For the Stoic's obligation to engage in public life, and Seneca's response, see *De otio* 3.2–5; Griffin 1992, 315–366.

18. Griffin 1992, 91.

19. *Ibid.*, 349–350, 418 n. 4. On the medieval division of the collection into two parts, Letters 1–88 and 89–124, see Reynolds 1965b.

20. So Hutchinson 1998, 19 n. 30. Nicholson's assertion (1998, 82–83) of a "taboo" against reading private letters is overstated.

21. Letters to others enclosed within letters to Atticus include *Att.* 4.17 [91], 8.1 [151], 8.6 [154], 8.11 [161], 9.6 [172]. Moreover, Atticus sent to Cicero copies of letters addressed to others: e.g., at *Att.* 13.1.1 [296] Cicero expresses approval of letters to Marcus *filius* and the Tullii. Oppius and Balbus sent Cicero a copy of a letter addressed to Clodius Patavinus (*Att.* 12.44.3 [285]).

22. Miller 1914 discusses additional examples; on the issue of confidentiality, see also Nicholson 1994.

23. *Fam.* 1.9 [20] is discussed in chapter 3. Cicero planned and drafted an open letter to Caesar, which Atticus circulated to preliminary readers, but he abandoned the project, basing his decision in part on the reactions of those readers (*Att.* 13.1 [296], 13.27 [298]).

24. On the episode, particularly Cicero's final insult—viz., the letter was not written in his own hand (*sua manu*) but dictated—see Butler 2002, 118–119.

25. Konstan 1997 provides an overview of ancient friendship. For terminology, see Hellegouarc'h 1972. The best account of friendship in Cicero's milieu is Brunt 1988. On the social practices that mediated and constituted friendship, see, e.g., Saller 1982, 1990; Wallace-Hadrill 1990; White 1993; Riggsby 1999; Bowditch 2001; Peachin 2001; Sadashige 2002; Verboven 2002; Griffin 2003 (particularly her comments on the limited applicability of "patronage theory," pp. 92–97); and, on consolatory letters, Wilcox 2005b.

26. “Friendship is a rare achievement. It is not a common or easily obtainable thing that is able to fill whole houses [with friends], as people commonly persuade themselves it is.” (*rara res est amicitia, [non] vulgaris aut exposita, ut implere totas domos possit: [quod] vulgo sibi homines persuasere*, Vottero 1998, 174 [F 60] = Haase 1884, 436 [F 96–97].)

27. Griffin 2003, 95 n. 17.

28. The *De officiis* itself is presented as a gift (*munus*) for its dedicatee, and also as a letter. On its epistolarity, see Gibson and Morrison 2007, 9–13. On *munus*, rather than *beneficium*, as the proper word for gifts that are texts, see Stroup 2010, 66–100.

29. Probably to avoid complicating his definition of friendship, which he says at *Off.* 1.55–56 is based on virtue. So Griffin 2003, 94–95.

30. Griffin 2003, 91–92.

31. I understand Griffin to imply that *beneficia* get cursory treatment in works on *amicitia* because neither Cicero nor Seneca thought of the exchange of *beneficia* as a defining feature of friendship. Nonetheless, the exchange of gifts was thoroughly woven into many instances of what we might term “genuine” friendship (that is, elective, egalitarian relations springing from shared interests and affection), as well as the euphemized Augustan patronage relations such as those that concern White 1993 and Bowditch 2001. Of course, as those scholars recognize, in reality features from both types of relationship often co-mingled, sometimes comfortably and sometimes less so. I suspect that Cicero’s omission may have stemmed from discomfort with the potential implications of connecting gift exchange with friendship at all.

32. For multiple participants and motion as characteristics of the gift, see Hyde 1983, 3–24.

33. Cf. Porter 1986, which models the letter as a straight line stretching from writer to addressee.

34. For increase, see Hyde 1983, 25–39.

35. For misrecognition and euphemism as characteristics of the gift, see Bourdieu 1990, helpfully excerpted by Schrift 1997, 190–230, and preceded by Mauss (1950, translated and reissued 1990). On the operation of self-deception and collective deception in gift exchange, see further Bourdieu 1997, 231–241.

36. In his account Bourdieu stresses “the lapse of time between gift and the counter-gift that makes it possible to mask the contradiction between the experienced (or desired) truth of the gift as a generous, gratuitous, unrequited act, and the truth that emerges from the model, which makes it a stage in a relationship of exchange that transcends singular acts of exchange” (1997, 231–232). Cf. Stroup on Cicero’s “Hesiodic reciprocity,” which she further characterizes—unnecessarily, to my mind—as “debt-exchange” (2010, 93–97). The gift always incurs debt; but Cicero leaves this open secret unspoken.

37. This insight of Mauss is summarized by Douglas 1990, viii–ix. On aristocratic competition and cooperation, see Wiseman 1985; with particular reference to *amicitia*, see, e.g., Habinek’s remark (1990, 170) that in the *Laelius de amicitia* Cicero offers “a new model of relationship between members of the ruling class that enables them, by pooling their resources (ethical as well as material) to maintain their supremacy.” Brunt, whose seminal study well illustrates the pragmatic durability and flexibility of *amicitia* relationships, comments on “the general unwillingness of the aristocracy to encompass or see the ruin of one of their own class” (1988, 375).



38. Wilcox 2005b and chapter 2 below.

39. Bourdieu uses gift exchange as the “canonical example” and “paradigm” of practice (1990, 104, 110). On gift giving in classical Rome, see Dixon 1993b.

40. This is not to deny the sincerity or depth of grief felt by bereaved Romans. See Kaster 2005 for the importance of being seen in the calculus of Roman emotion. Sherman 2005 makes a similar claim for the “face” value gained by coping impassively with adversity in the contemporary American armed forces.

41. Many theorists of the letter have seen this evocation and reiteration of desire as central to epistolarity. See, e.g., Altman 1982, 11–46.

42. On erotic elements in homosocial friendships in Catullus, see Fitzgerald 1995; Gunderson 1997; Sadashige 2002; in Augustan poetry, Oliensis 1997.

43. Leach 1993. Habinek concurs that Atticus’s way of life fostered his enduring intimacy with Cicero (see 1990, 180, on *Att.* 1.17 [17]), but argues that the requisite competition between politically engaged aristocrats precluded an “open and intimate” friendship (p. 177). See also Griffin 1997, on Cicero’s exchange of letters discussing the duties of a friend and citizen with Matus (*Fam.* 11.27 and 28 [348, 349]).

44. Translated by J. G. F. Powell: see Powell 1990, 34.

45. Leach (1993, 18–19) directs our attention to *Fam.* 5.7.3, a letter to Pompey in which Cicero proposes the parallel roles explicitly. Habinek (1990, 182–183) suggests that Cicero’s approach to Antony in the first *Philippic* was an attempt to put the ruminations of *De amicitia* into practice.

46. Seneca mentions the harmonious bond (*concordia*) between Scipio and Laelius at *Ep.* 95.72. Laelius appears as a moral exemplar at *Ep.* 7.6, 11.10, 25.6, 64.10, and 104.21.

47. Inwood 2007b, 307–308. Seneca quotes from Cicero’s letters to Atticus three times: twice in *Ep.* 118.1–2, and once at 97.4. He never quotes from the letters *Ad familiares*. This absence may be a matter of chance, or it may be taken as evidence that those letters remained unpublished, but it would also be in keeping with Seneca’s taking the part of Atticus, rather than Cicero, in his correspondence with Lucilius.

48. Nor can the collection be adequately understood as an attempt to rival Cicero’s literary accomplishment as a writer of letters, though that ambition surely occurred to Seneca, as Inwood (2007a, 137) remarks.

49. See Habinek and Schiesaro 1997, xxi and *passim*. For what follows, I am indebted particularly to Wallace-Hadrill 1997 in that volume.

50. Translated by Barbara Levick. See Levick 1985, 99–102, for ancient sources on the *cursus publicus*.

51. Latin text from Horace, *Epistles Book I*, ed. Mayer 1994.

52. Hopkins 1983, 149.

53. For the limitations of this generalization, see *ibid.*, 56–60.

54. See Bloomer 1997b, 200, on Seneca the Elder’s project of “elevat[ing] what was a schoolroom practice to the status of old-time oratory.” On the early imperial debate over the decline of oratory, see Dominik 1997.

55. Dupont (1997, 44–59) has argued that literary *recitatio* reclaims a space for *libertas* under the principate: recitations of literary works “created a community founded on gift and counter-gift” and thus revived the values of the republican elite (p. 53). In contrast, “the problem with reading a book, the reason it is invalid as an honorable practice, is that it does not permit a reciprocity of exchange” (p. 59). Epistolary writing succeeds in working around this dead end, Dupont writes, by simulating dialogic exchange. Pliny’s

correspondence with Tacitus is her example, but Horace is also apt. His *Epistulae* must have debuted in *recitationes*, and they also availed themselves of epistolary dialogism.

56. Altman 1986; Porter 1986; Beebee 1999. Wallace-Hadrill (1990, 81–84) notes a structural political parallel between seventeenth-century France and early imperial Rome.

57. On Horace's personification of his book in *Ep.* 1.20, see Fraenkel 1957, 356–363; Oliensis 1995. On Ovid's personification of his exile poetry, see, e.g., Hinds 1985. For Horace's negotiation of the gifts and duties of friendship with Maecenas and Augustus, see Oliensis 1998, 154–197; Bowditch 2001.

58. Two of the most precisely located letters are written from, and about, the villas of Vatia (Letter 55) and of Scipio Africanus (Letter 86) near Naples. On the significance of Seneca's travel in retirement and his visits to these particular locations, see Henderson 2004, 53–118.

59. See, e.g., *Ep.* 47.1, where an anonymous objector criticizes Lucilius for living on intimate terms (*familiariter*) with his slaves. Seneca replies that *servi* are fellow humans (*homines*), fellow soldiers (*contubernales*), and humble friends (*humiles amici*). The interesting adjective *humiles* notwithstanding, Seneca argues in this letter, as elsewhere, that moral standing, not social, is the measure of a person's worth. On *Ep.* 47, see Bradley 2008, 338–339; Edwards 2009, 152–153.

60. On topical discontinuity and thematic interrelationship: Wilson 1987. Ker (2009a, 147) remarks that the collection “is defined by repetition yet may end at any point.” On this feature as integral to preparation and consolation for death, see chapter 8 below; Ker 2009a, 147–176.

61. On *meditatio* and *praemeditatio malorum*, see Hadot 1969; Newman 1989; Arminen-Marchetti 2008.

62. This impression of artless speed persists, in spite of intricate word order, density of imagery, and striking juxtapositions—both verbal and conceptual—that suggest careful composition and polishing, perhaps over the course of many sittings. On Seneca's style in the *Moral Epistles* see Coleman 1974; Wilson 1987; Mazzoli 1989, 1863–1868.

63. Petrarch, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, 24.13. Translated by Morris Bishop (1966, 211). On Petrarch's “Senecan habit,” see Ker 2009a, 314–317, 355–358.

Chapter 1. Euphemism and Its Limits

1. Bourdieu 1990, 107.

2. Brunt 1988, 356.

3. In this passage Shackleton Bailey prints *onus* for *munus*, on the basis of its slightly better textual authority. In his commentary (1977, 381), however, he notes that *munus* fits the context as well as or better than *onus* does. In his Oxford edition, Watt opts for *munus*, as I have here.

4. The management of time is critical to gift exchange generally, and specifically to misrecognition: Bourdieu 1990, 98–111, esp. 105–107. See also Bourdieu 1997, 231–232.

5. Sallust puts a similar assertion about friendship into Catiline's mouth: “I have understood that what is good or ill fortune for you is the same for me. For to prefer and disprefer likewise, this is precisely what strong friendship is.” (*vobis eadem quae mihi bona malaque esse intellexi; nam idem velle atque idem nolle, ea demum firma amicitia est, Cat.* 20.) Latin text from *Catilina, Iugurtha, Historiarum Fragmenta Selecta, Appendix Sallustiana*, ed. Reynolds 1991.



6. E.g., *Fam.* 3.8, which responds apparently point by point to a list of complaints by Appius, among them that Cicero had relieved the citizens of Midaïum of the expectation that they would send a delegation to the senate in Rome in praise of Appius's governorship. Cicero explains his action to Appius (he wished to save the town a considerable expense that they could ill afford), but also suggests that Appius is too sophisticated (*urbanus*) to care for such empty traditional gestures. Fitzgerald (1995, 92) comments: "For Cicero to get away with his excuse, he would have to be offering Appius a new and desirable kind of self-image." On the exchange, see also Hall 2009, 146–149.

7. Cicero mentions the dedication at *Fam.* 3.4.1 [67] as culminating evidence of Appius's warm feelings toward him.

8. Shackleton Bailey 1977, 436.

9. On *alter ego* see Lossman 1962, 33–51. On Cicero's correspondence with Caesar, see White 2003; Damon 2008.

10. *Fam.* 7.5.2 [26]: "[The man] whom you recommend . . . I will make king of Gaul" (quem mihi commendas, . . . regem Galliae faciam).

11. See Hanssen 1951, 216–217, for the diminutives in this letter and in other epistolary requests by Cicero, where they often, according to Hanssen, act as "expression[s] of modesty . . . which in fact indicate the opposite feeling in the writer."

12. Possibly here Cicero is playing on a legal formula or alluding to a legal procedure of *traditio*. Trebatius was a jurist, so such wordplay would be especially fitting, and elsewhere in his letters to Trebatius, Cicero frequently puns on words that have legal applications (e.g., *cavere* and *sapit* in *Fam.* 7.6.2 [27], as Shackleton Bailey notes [1977, 333]).

13. Bourdieu 1990, 126. Similarly, Malinowski: "to possess is to be great. . . . But the important point is that . . . to possess is to give" (1984, 97).

14. Other instances of *alterum me / me alterum* are *Att.* 3.15.4 [60]: "te [Atticum] quasi me alterum"; *Att.* 4.1.7 [73]: Cicero reports that Pompey "me alterum se fore dixit"; *Ad Brut.* 23.2: "[Messalla] ad te [Brutum] tamquam ad alterum me proficiscens"; *Amic.* 80: "est enim [sc. verus amicus] is qui est alter idem."

15. Strathern 1988, 180.

16. In his *Epistles*, Horace recommends a similar practice to the ambitious man. When he greets influential people, he should do so familiarly, adding the kinship term appropriate to their age: "Add 'father,' add 'brother' to each according to his age, thus, charmingly, adopt them" ("frater" "pater" adde; / ut cuique est aetas, ita quemque facetus adopta, *Ep.* 1.6.54–55).

17. White (2010, 24–25) also cites this letter to exemplify the importance in late republican letters of foregrounding personal relationships and other "bonds" (*vincula*) between correspondents.

18. In a sense, both Messala (*Ad Brut.* 23 [23]), and Trebatius (*Fam.* 7.5 [26]) occupy the place of objects rather than persons, an effect of epistolary rhetoric that I discuss in chapter 4.

19. Cic. *Amic.* 23 and 80; Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 9.1166a and 1170b6. The notion was also Stoic: Diog. Laert. 7.23.

20. As Damon (2008, 179) also notes.

21. On the complex negotiations over Cicero and Varro's exchange of literary gifts, see Bloomer 1997a, 251 n. 14; on the use of *munus* in this letter to refer to a dedicated text, see Stroup 2010, 97.

22. Saller (1990, 53) adduces this sentence as evidence for the lack of a "technical"

rule of exclusivity in patron-client relations, but his assertion that Manius “slips easily” between the language of *amicitia* and *patronatus* in this letter likely overestimates Manius’s rhetorical facility.

23. *Mancipium* is full ownership, opposed to a more limited right, such as usufruct. Watson (1968, 17) follows Gaius (*Inst.* 1.120) in listing slaves, oxen, horses, mules and asses, and Italic land as property classed as *res Mancipi*.

Chapter 2. Consolation and Competition

1. Consolations for political disappointment, exile, or both are addressed to T. Fadius (*Fam.* 5.18 [51]), P. Nigidius Figulus (4.13 [225]), S. Sulpicius Rufus (4.3 [202], discussed below), A. Torquatus (6.1 [242], 6.2 [245], 6.3 [243], 6.4 [244]), A. Caecina (6.6.12–13) [234], Trebanus (6.10b [222]), Q. Ligarius (6.13 [227]), Toranius (6.20 [247], 6.21 [246]), Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (6.22 [221]), M. Terentius Varro (9.2 [177], 9.3 [176], 9.4 [180]), and M. Marcellus (4.8 [229]). *Fam.* 5.13 [201], to L. Lucceius, responds to a political consolation. Only two letters by Cicero dedicated to consoling the bereaved survive: *Ad Brut.* 17 [18] and *Fam.* 5.16 [187]; both are discussed below.

2. On bereavement, these topoi include “all men are mortal,” and “death is merely the cessation of consciousness,” familiar from Epicurus’s *Letter to Menoeceus* (124.1 in Long and Sedley 1987, 149): “Accustom yourself to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil lie in sensation, whereas death is the absence of sensation.” In Latin, see Lucr. 3.830–831; Cic. *Tusc.* 1.9–15. Ancient consolation frequently urges its addressees to anticipate the eventual healing power of time by means of their rational faculty (Cic. *Fam.* 5.16.6; Sen. *Ep.* 63.12) or virtuous character (Sen. *Ad Marciam* 8.1–3). On topoi in Latin consolations, see Fern 1941; for an overview of consolatory discourse in antiquity, see Kassel 1958 and briefer treatments in Manning 1981 and Scourfield 1993.

3. Crantor’s fragments are edited by H. J. Mette 1984; for his influence on Cicero, see Graver 2002, 187–194.

4. *Att.* 12.14.3 [251]: “Quin etiam feci, quod profecto ante me nemo, ut ipse me per litteras consolaretur.”

5. This Titius may be the recipient of *Fam.* 13.75 [60], but the name was common at that time, as Shackleton Bailey (1977, 325) notes.

6. Shackleton Bailey 1977, 325. Titius’s children were male, and apparently victims of an epidemic at Rome in the summer of 46.

7. The exemplary passage of consolation contained in pseudo-Demetrius’s *Tupoi epistolokoi* is similarly vague, though its lack of specific detail may be attributable precisely to its status as a generic example. For the text and translation, see Malherbe 1988, 34–35.

8. Hutchinson 1998, 33.

9. Commonplaces: at *Tusc.* 3.28 Cicero quotes from Ennius’s tragedy *Telamon*: “I knew when I bore them that they would die, and it was for death I reared them.” (Ego cum genui, tum morituros scivi et ei rei sustuli.) Cicero reproves grief for premature death at *Tusc.* 1.93, comparing nature to a creditor who is permitted to call in a loan at any time. He quotes from Euripides’s lost *Theseus* and from Terence’s comedy *Phormio* (lines 241–246) to illustrate that being prepared for unexpected misfortune will make it less distressing (*Tusc.* 3.29–30).

10. Hutchinson (1998, 58) notes the “we” statements in this climactic sentence, but



does not point out that they highlight the unity of interest between the partners in correspondence.

11. *Ibid.*, 51.

12. Bourdieu 1990, 107.

13. It appears from *Fam.* 4.7 [230] that Marcellus's pardon was assured but not yet formally granted; Caesar wanted a guarantee that if the offer was made, it would be accepted.

14. Whereas reassurance, advice, and consolation are all grouped together in *Fam.* 4.8 [229], in *Fam.* 6.20 [247] to Toranius Cicero distinguishes advising from consoling: "In this letter I will be briefer, and as I consoled you earlier, this time I will advise" (*eo nunc ero brevior teque, ut antea consolabar, hoc tempore monebo*).

15. In other words, we may infer, if Cicero's actions should appear to be at odds with those of members of Marcellus's family and his purported friends, Marcellus should consider that those people are not truly acting in his interest.

16. Actually Marcellus's cousin (*cos.* 50). Marcellus's brother of the same name (*cos.* 49) had already died.

17. Hutchinson (1998, 51) remarks that *etsi . . . tamen* is a common opening device. See, e.g., *Fam.* 6.1 [242], quoted below.

18. According to Nepos, *Att.* 11.2, Torquatus was with the Republican forces defeated at Philippi in 42.

19. E.g., *Fam.* 6.1.4 [242]: "When everything has gone to ruin, virtue is able nevertheless to support itself" (*perditis rebus omnibus tamen ipsa virtus se sustentare posse videatur*).

20. E.g., *Fam.* 6.1.5 [242]: "And yet, this comes to mind as I write—namely, that I am the man whom you used to charge with despair. . . . But now, I ask that you take on that courage which you considered fitting then for me." (*Atque haec mihi scribenti veniebat in mentem me esse eum cuius tu desperationem accusare solitus esses. . . . Sed tu illum animum nunc adhibe, quaeso, quo me tum esse oportere censebas.*)

21. Hutchinson 1998, 51.

22. Cicero uses a nearly identical phrase (*"non debes . . . postulare . . . recusare"*) in a much briefer letter to Plancius (*Fam.* 4.15.2 [241]).

23. See White 2010, 39–61, for the ancient editor's principles of selection.

24. Their friendship was already established in 63, when Servius brought suit against the consul-elect Murena and Cicero appeared as counsel for the defendant. Cicero reassures his adversary of their continued friendship at *Mur.* 10, as is also noted by Brunt (1988, 375). After Servius's death, Cicero testified at length to their friendship in *Phil.* 9.

25. Servius's governorship: *Fam.* 4.3 [202], 4.4 [203], 6.6.10 [234].

26. Scourfield (1993, 20) calls *Fam.* 4.5 "perhaps the most famous (certainly one of the most beautiful) of all the *consolationes* of the ancient world."

27. Compare Cassius Parmensis's positioning of himself among Cicero's family and friends (*Fam.* 12.13.2 [419]). Nonetheless, the use of the third person and the extreme length of this sentence are notable also for the distance they create. On this feature of Roman aristocratic discourse, see Lakoff 1990, 226–227.

28. On Cicero's argument from exemplars in *Fam.* 4.6, see Wilcox 2005a.

29. Hutchinson 1998, 26.

30. On Cicero's relations with Brutus, see Boissier 1903, 303–358.

31. *Brut.* 3.11–13. See Hendrickson 1939 for the circumstances, possible places of composition, and contents of the *De virtute*; his argument that *Brutus* was composed in recompense for that work is plausible, but the contention that the *De virtute* was a “personal letter to Cicero” is unpersuasive. The epistolary address of the *De virtute* is more likely to have been equivalent to that of Cicero’s *De officiis*, on which see Gibson and Morrison 2007, 9–13. Alternatively, the copy of the *De virtute* that Brutus sent to Cicero, whether or not it was explicitly dedicated to Cicero, may have been accompanied by a cover letter that offered more personal consolation. Trebonius’s letter accompanying his book of Ciceronian *dicta* offers a parallel case. On that letter, see the discussion of *Fam.* 15.21 [207] in chapter 3.

32. The advice to take the moral higher ground, which could be comforting as well as expedient in connection with a retreat from active politics, might not suffice to console someone for a domestic loss. Cicero gives similar advice to M. Terentius Varro (*Fam.* 9.2.5 [177]). In August 46 Cicero reports that after receiving morning visitors, he buries himself in the library and produces books, rather than passively mourning the demise of the republic (*Fam.* 7.28.2 [200]).

33. Strict standards: Brutus was an Antiochean Academic (*Att.* 13.25 [333]). In *Tusc.* 5.21–82, Cicero criticizes the adoption by Antiochus of the Stoic views that the wise person does not experience emotion, and that virtue is sufficient for happiness, on which see Graver 2002, xxiv–xxv.

34. He does not mention his own contrasting behavior—namely, his two-month retreat at Astura, which may have earned him Brutus’s reproach for grieving too “softly” (“cum enim mollius tibi ferre viderer quam deceret virum,” *Ad Brut.* 17.1[18]).

35. Cicero’s similar compliments to Titius (*Fam.* 5.16 [187]) and M. Marcellus (4.8.1 [229]) suggest that this compliment to Brutus is conventional for the genre, though it also seems specifically suitable to this addressee.

36. Another instance of Cicero’s seizing the opportunity afforded by a death, in this case the death of a senior colleague and a rival, to promote himself and his own work is found at the opening of the *Brutus*, which begins as a tribute to and commemoration for Q. Hortensius, most eminent orator at Rome next to Cicero, and his sponsor for admittance to the augurate, for which reason Cicero writes that he ought to regard him in place of a father (“in parentis eum loco colere debebam,” *Brut.* 1.1).

37. For this request, see *Fam.* 5.12 [22]. Hall (1998) offers an astute analysis of the letter’s style.

38. Ill health as excuse for Cicero’s absence from Rome: *Fam.* 6.2.1 [245]; *Att.* 12.13.2 [250]; *Att.* 12.15 [252]; summer recess as excuse: *Att.* 12.40.3 [281].

39. Cic. *Tusc.* 3.66: “Moreover, what has more power to set aside grief than understanding that it accomplishes nothing and is undertaken in vain?” (Quid est autem quod plus valeat ad ponendum dolorem, quam cum est intellectum nihil profici et frustra esse susceptum?)

40. Cicero notes both in the same breath (*Fam.* 5.15.1 [252]): “using the most loving words you charge me severely” (amantissimis verbis utens re graviter accusas).

41. Strathern 1988, 180.

42. Letters of consolation for political ills do not rely on an actual third participant, but a third position more loosely delimited as the public eye may be included, acting as the monitor of the recipient’s self-control.

43. On the euphemistic use of kinship in *Fam.* 2.2 [46], see chapter 1.



44. Cf. Beard 2002, 133–134, on Quintus Cicero's attribution of *humanitas* to Tiro in his letter complimenting Marcus Cicero for Tiro's manumission.

45. Fitzgerald (2000, 51–68) discusses mediatory roles played by slaves between masters.

46. Strathern 1988, 180.

Chapter 3. Absence and Increase

1. On poem 50 as necessarily physical, an “object of affection” and exchange, see Stroup 2010, 229–234. Alternatively, it might be read as the “cover letter” for poem 51, a suggestion made by Lavency 1965 and endorsed by, among others, Wray 2001, 99–109. On this reading, Catullus 51 becomes the increase on the gift, as are Trebonius's *Cicero* and Cicero's *Orator*, discussed below.

2. See, e.g., Wray 2001. Gunderson (1997) also has observed the libidinal economy of literary letters (or “love letters”) between Roman men, focusing on Catullus 50 and Pliny, *Ep.* 1.15; for theoretical background and comparative cases in English literature, see Sedgwick 1985.

3. Exceptions include Fitzgerald 1995; Krostenko 2001; and Stroup 2010.

4. Translation by Powell 1990, slightly modified.

5. Powell 1990, 3–5, 18–21.

6. For another example, see *Fam.* 8.3 [79], from M. Caelius Rufus, who laments Cicero's absence and his loss of Cicero's company, comparing Rome without Cicero to a wasteland (*solitudo*), and characterizing Cicero's inaccessibility to him as torture (*discrucior*, 8.3.1). Then, after sharing some political gossip, Caelius asks Cicero to write and dedicate a book (σύνταγμα) to him, to remind posterity of their friendship (“aliquod ex tam multis tuis monumentis exstare quod nostrae amicitiae memoriam posteris quoque prodat,” 8.3.3).

7. For the convention of including a “commemorative routine” of mutual services in familiar correspondence, see Hall 2009, 56–60; on *Fam.* 15.21 specifically, see pp. 62–64, where Hall concludes that the extended *commemoratio* in this letter is a “metaphorical gift” and expression of “reciprocal *amor*” for Trebonius.

8. Hyde 1983, 15. Similarly, Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, “The only gift is a portion of thyself” in his 1844 essay, “The Gift,” reprinted in Schrift 1997, 25–27.

9. The correspondence of Cicero and Calvus was extant in antiquity; only small fragments, quoted by late antique grammarians, remain. We do not know how Trebonius had come upon the letter to Calvus. If this letter to Trebonius betrays a hint of neoteric *venustas* that is unexpected from Cicero, one wonders very much whether a similar kind of register may have obtained in his letters to Calvus, the exciting friend to whom Catullus 50 is addressed. For a historian's take on Calvus's connections with Cicero, see Gruen 1967.

10. One might object that Calvus was dead by 46, and so no rivalry could obtain. But Cicero continued to inveigh bitterly against the dead Clodius in the *Paradoxa Stoicorum*; especially if Cicero and Calvus's letters were in circulation, it is entirely possible that Trebonius could still protest if he saw Calvus, or his style, being preferred by Cicero.

11. “His tribe compels me to think he is honest.” (Natio me hominis impulit ut ei recte putarem, *Fam.* 15.20.1 [208].) According to the stereotype, Sabines preserved ancient standards of virtue.

12. Similarly, Cic. *Cael.* 6: “If [this kind of utterance] is hurled about carelessly, it is

called abuse; but if with witty elegance, then it is called urbanity” (quae si petulantius iactatur, convicium, si facetius, urbanitas nominatur). See Bourdieu 1984, 195, for a cross-cultural example of joking to mark (and thus excuse) a social transgression.

13. Lentulus’s prominence and his particular importance to Cicero’s fortunes are reinforced by the position of Cicero’s letters to him in the collection *Ad familiares*, where they make up all but one of the letters in Book 1 (1–9; Letter 10 is addressed to a friend of Cicero’s to whom Lentulus had lent assistance). Likewise, Cicero’s *pietas* toward Lentulus is a leitmotif of these letters; it occurs within the first line of *Fam.* 1.1 (“Ego omni officio ac potius pietate erga te ceteris satis facio omnibus, mihi ipse numquam satis facio”) as well as at *Fam.* 1.8.2, and at 1.9.1 and 1.9.23, discussed below.

14. Cf. Shackleton Bailey 1977, 307: “[Cicero] will have written . . . partly in hope that Lentulus, who would soon be back in Rome, might pass on the substance if not the words to others.”

15. The moral weight of *pietas* here is stressed by expansion: “illud ipsum gravissimum et sanctissimum nomen pietatis.” It is instructive to compare Hall’s discussion (2009, 71–76) of *Fam.* 5.8, to Crassus, a letter intended to effect a reconciliation. Cicero’s use of *foedus* and *sanctissime* in that letter, “with their religious and ethical overtones, goes far beyond the usual epistolary conventions” (p. 75). Hall further suggests that a fulsome style (“multis verbis”) that has often been misinterpreted by modern scholars as simple insincerity was *de rigueur* when reconciliation was the aim of a conversation or a letter (p. 75, with reference to *Att.* 16.5.2).

16. Cicero’s works are personified here as witnesses (*testes*), in keeping with the personification of the volumes of his *Academica* as messengers (*admonitores*, *Fam.* 9.8.1 [254]), and a letter of Caesar as a guarantor and witness (“testis . . . vel sponsor,” *Fam.* 7.5.2 [26]), both of which are discussed in chapter 1.

17. Cicero is pained by the imputation that he could have forgotten to act on Lentulus’s requests. Perhaps there is the additional implication that Lentulus’s interests are so close to Cicero’s heart that he does not even need to be asked to perform certain services on Lentulus’s behalf—he has already undertaken them, without need for a request.

18. Shackleton Bailey (1977, 316) notes that posterity will be informed of Lentulus’s benefactions to Cicero by the poem *De temporibus meis*, which Cicero has described in the previous section of the letter (*Fam.* 1.9.23).

19. Although Cicero does not call on family ties in *Fam.* 15.21, in a later letter (*Fam.* 12.16 [328]) Trebonius does just that, reporting on his encounter with M. Cicero *filius* in Athens. At the bottom of this letter, he copies out a poem he has written, versifying a witticism of Cicero’s that contained a compliment to him (“concinnavi tibi munusculum ex instituto meo et dictum cum magno nostro honore a te dictum conclusi et tibi infra subscripsi”), thus reminding Cicero of their earlier exchange of literary gifts, and renewing it. On this letter, its political context, and the work it does, see White 2010, 6–10.

Chapter 4. Recommendation

1. Previous work on Cicero’s recommendation letters includes Deniaux’s detailed study (1993) and articles by Cotton (1985, 1986). Rees 2007 compares the commendatory epistolary rhetoric of Cicero with that of Pliny, Fronto, and a modern exemplar. For documentary letters of recommendation in ancient Greek, see Kim 1972. For Latin, see Cotton 1981.



2. White 2010, 46.
3. E.g., *Fam.* 7.5, discussed in chapter 1. White (2010, 46) counts thirty-three.
4. Hyde 1983, 33. Similarly, Strathern 1988, 176: “In a gift economy, objects act as persons in relation to one another.”
5. Deniaux (1993, 44) identifies four elements in the “ritual” of Ciceronian recommendation: recall of a previous connection to the addressee, an appeal on the basis of friendship, the expression of the writer’s gratitude, and a promise of gratitude on the part of the protégé.
6. Farrell 2004, 264; Damon 2008, 180–181; Hall 2009, 32–33.
7. Rees (2007, 157) reads *Fam.* 13.51 [61] as an example of “the *amicitia* triangle.” See also Wilcox 2002, 102–104, for this letter as an example of the triangular structure of *litterae commendaticiae*.
8. For a complete list, see Wilcox 2002, 334. Similarly, see Hall 2009, 198–200, for expressions of thanks, joy, and pleasure.
9. For prescriptions of the proper expression of *gratia*, see, e.g., *Sen. Ben.* 4.21; *Ep.* 81 *passim*. On *gratia* as a social value, see D’Agostino 1959; Moussy 1966.
10. Cf. Rees (2007, 156), who remarks on the “irony . . . that the letter of recommendation . . . was at least as much about the promotion of the author as it was about the subject.”
11. Cotton (1981, 12) includes other Ciceronian examples, such as “Peto igitur . . . quod sine molestia fiat” (*Fam.* 13.2 [314]).
12. Similarly, see Rees 2007, 154, on *Fam.* 13.49 [313].
13. The letter has urged Thermus to intervene in favor of Cicero’s legate Marcus Anneius in a dispute with the people of Sardis. No details of the case are mentioned.
14. The sixth is a letter of advice. In it, Cicero counsels Thermus to name his quaestor L. Antonius as his successor in the governorship of Asia.
15. For the recommended as the bearer of his recommendation, see, e.g., *Att.* 10.17.1 [209], *Fam.* 13.6a [58], 6.8.3 [235], 7.30.3 [265]. For attestations of this practice in documentary letters of recommendation, see Cotton 1981, 5.
16. Cf. Cicero to Atticus, referring to Varro: “When I praise one of your circle to you, I want him to know it.” (Cum aliquem apud te laudaro tuorum familiarium, volam illum scire ex te me id fecisse, *Att.* 2.25.1 [45].)
17. Of course a letter’s carrier could be asked by either the recipient or the sender to supplement the letter’s written message orally (e.g., *Att.* 9.6A [172A]). It is a much neater trick to turn the letter’s *recipient* into a message-bearer to its carrier.
18. It is worth noting the financial connotation in this genitive of value. The idea of reckoning the worth of one’s friends or one’s own reputation in financial terms occurs without fanfare in Cicero’s letters, but Seneca draws attention to his use of this kind of language in his *Moral Epistles*, as I discuss in chapter 5. Also see Habinek (1998, 45–59), who discusses the significance of the dual moral and financial meanings of *existimo*.
19. For a reading of *Fam.* 13.1 [63] as an example of those designated by Cicero as “carefully written” (*litterae accurate scriptae*), see White 2010, 96–100.
20. For Patro’s spoken thanks to Cicero, see *Att.* 5.11.6 [104]; for Atticus’s gratitude, see *Att.* 5.19.3 [112].
21. Manuscripts vary as to this addressee’s name, which may have been Q. (?) Quinctius Gallus. I follow Shackleton Bailey in calling him Gallius.
22. Beebe 1999, 22.

23. The letter-writer's active bestowal of power on the recipient adds to the latter's active role as reader the role of guarantor as well. But since this request for complicity is framed as such, the willing accomplice is co-opted by agreeing to the writer's aims at the same time that he exercises his power in the roles of respectful, responsive friend to the letter-writer and benefactor to the writer's protégé.

24. As Hall (1996, 23) points out, in correspondence as in other social interactions, risk is shared: "In most encounters the faces of *both* speaker and addressee are to some extent vulnerable." Just as each participant in a successful transaction stood to benefit, a letter that misfired could injure all parties. On "face-threat" see also Hall 2009, 6.

25. Bourdieu 1990, 129.

26. Sarcasm: "I don't expect much from Greeks" (*haec non nimis exquiro a Graecis, Att. 7.18.3* [142]).

27. "I have sent Dionysius, who is aflame with desire for you, not with a light heart, but because I felt it had to be permitted. I already knew that he was a learned man, and now I know that he is virtuous, ready to serve, zealous for my reputation, a honest man and, lest I seem to praise merely a freedman, I know he is a really good man." (*Dionysium flagrantem desiderio tui misi ad te, nec mehercule aequo animo, sed fuit concedendum. Quem quidem cognovi cum doctum, quod mihi iam ante erat notum, tum sanctum, plenum officii, studiosum etiam meae laudis, frugi hominem, ac, ne libertinum laudare videar, plane virum bonum, Att. 7.4.1* [127].)

28. The letter referred to is probably *Att. 7.4* [127], which opens with a commendation, noted above.

29. On ingratitude, see D'Agostino 1959. Dixon (1993a) has examined the importance of gratitude in "the language of patronage" shared by the ancient Roman elite and modern American gangsters.

30. McCarthy (1998) and Fitzgerald (2000) have sketched the homology between the letter and the loyal freedman or slave, who was often the bearer of messages, and could be lent out to his owner's or patron's friends as a sort of gift.

31. For Atticus's encouragement of Cicero's friendship with Brutus, see, e.g., *Att. 6.1.3* [115], 6.2.7 [116].

32. "Nevertheless I delivered the prefectures that I had promised to Brutus through you to M. Scaptius and L. Gavius, who are taking care of Brutus's business in the realm [i.e., Cappadocia]." (*Ego tamen quas per te Bruto promiseram praefecturas M. Scaptio, L. Gavio, qui in regno rem Bruti procurabant, detuli, Att. 6.1.4* [115].)

33. See *Att. 6.3.6–7* [117] for Cicero's recounting of Gavius's rudeness to him, and the climactic incident. Cicero's use of the term "rival" (*aemulus*) recalls Girard's desiring triangle (1965, 1–21), in which two rivals compete for the affections of a third party; here, the triangle is a homosocial one.

34. Deniaux 1993, 44.

35. Rees 2007, 167.

Chapter 5. From Practice to Metaphor

1. On Seneca's epistolary emulation of Cicero, see Griffin 1992, 3–4, 350, 418–419; Inwood 2007a, 141–142. On the generic economy suggested by *Ep. 118*, see Ker 2006, 31–38.

2. On Epicurus as Seneca's model, see Setaioli 1988, 171–248; Hachmann 1995, 220–237; and Inwood 2007a, 141–148.



3. Of course, Cicero also modeled writing philosophy in Latin. But the “relatively easy bilingualism” of Seneca’s milieu, and the “primary” nature of his philosophy (rather than “exegetical or missionary,” as Cicero’s often was), distinguish Seneca’s choice of Latin from that of Cicero. See Inwood 2005, 7–22, for the implications of his choice (I have quoted from pp. 12–13 here). These include a commitment to “frank Romanness” (Inwood 2005, 22), which in itself sets Seneca apart from the Greek philosophical epistolary tradition. Graver (1996, 41) notes that using Latin was both protreptic and intimate, “the language a senator would speak with his wife or child.”

4. On the reality of Lucilius, see Griffin 1992, 91, and further, Graver 1996, 24–29. For the work’s date, relative to the retirement of Lucilius, see Griffin 1992, 349.

5. Russell 1974, 72.

6. Direct references to Cicero are unevenly distributed. His name occurs in five letters from Book 2 through Book 6 (*Ep.* 17.2, 21.4, 40.11, 49.5, 58.6, 12, and 16), then not again until Letter 97, in Book 16. In the later books, Cicero’s name occurs in seven letters (*Ep.* 97.3 and 4, 100.7 and 9, 107.10, 108.30, 32, and 34, 111.1, 114.16, 118.1 and 2).

7. Edwards (1997, 24) directs our attention to how Seneca draws metaphors from the public practices “from which the Ciceronian persona takes its meaning” to express “the would-be philosopher’s inner life. On Seneca’s didactic and therapeutic use of metaphor, see Armisen-Marchetti 1989 and 2008; on the necessity of metaphor to Seneca’s philosophy, see Bartsch 2009. See also Griffin’s remarks (1992, 318) on Seneca’s “paradoxical use of language.”

8. Cf. Ker 2009a, 66, on the strikingly similar course of Seneca’s and Cicero’s careers.

9. On *ambitus* trials in Ciceronian Rome, and their connection with the disordered state of the total economy at that time, see Riggsby 1999, 21–49. See Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 83, on imperial patronage and the discontinuation of magisterial elections in AD 14.

10. Bartsch 2009, 194, 198.

11. *Ibid.*, 198.

12. See Habinek 1992, 193–194, on financial language as a means of managing the “revised economic order” of the principate.

13. Graver (1996, 137–178) discusses the financial metaphors in tandem with Seneca’s critique of Epicurean *meditatio*.

14. Armisen-Marchetti 1989 indexes several of these terms. See esp. pp. 98–99 (*commerce*) and p. 106 (*dons*). Levick (2003, 216) observes that for Seneca, profit (*lucrum*) is only good when it is metaphorical.

15. *Att.* 16.3.1 [413]; *Fam.* 12.16.3 [328].

16. Dixon (1993b, 454) remarks on the Romans’ “notional reticence about the essential reciprocity of all giving,” but she does not examine euphemism and misrecognition, nor does she distinguish between the rhetorical tactics of different practitioners working in different periods.

17. On this passage, see also Graver 1996, 156.

18. *Ibid.*, 155.

19. See, e.g., *Ep.* 98.10. *Ususfructus* is the ownership right that Manius Curius attributes to Cicero, whereas Atticus retains *mancipium* (*Fam.* 7.29, discussed in chapter 1). On kinds of property and kinds of ownership, see Watson 1968; for jokes about *ususfructus* see his discussion of Plautus, *Casina* 836–837 (pp. 203–204).

20. See, e.g., *Ep.* 9.19.

21. On this shift, pegged to Lucilius's progress in philosophy, see Griffin 1992, 351–353; Hachmann 1995, 219; Graver 1996, 165–178.

22. On Seneca's assimilation of a single day, a life, and a letter, see Ker 2009a, 168–174.

23. On Lucilius's retirement, see Griffin 1992, 347–351.

24. Seneca opens Letter 15 by commenting on the traditional epistolary salutation, "If you are well, good; I am well" (*si vales bene est, ego valeo*), only to critique it: "We should say, 'If you are doing philosophy, good.'" (*Recte nos dicimus "si philosopharis, bene est,"* 15.1.) For the formula, see Cugusi 1983, 28–29, 48. On its use by Cicero, see White 2010, 71–73.

25. *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (OLD), s.v. *peculium*.

26. See Hijmans 1976, 135–136, on the "vocabulary of property" that infuses the letter. Lotito (2001, 148–175) discusses "*vindica te tibi*" in conjunction with "*manum inieceris*" (1.2). On the wider range of *vindicatio*, see Richardson-Hay 2006, *ad loc*; Edwards 2009, 139; Ker 2009a, 157. On *vindicatio in libertatem*, see Watson 1967, 218–225.

27. On ownership as "the main metaphor for our relationship to ourselves," see Bartsch 2009, 204–208.

28. For the philosophical content of this letter together with Letter 94, see Inwood 2005, 95–131. On the contribution of Letters 94 and 95 to Seneca's program for and philosophy of therapeutic reading, see Graver 1996, 121–136; Schafer 2009.

29. Interestingly, according to Seneca fault does not lie in the inequitable, overbearing requirements of the dominant partner. Rather, out of timidity or unthinking habit or a mistaken regard for social propriety, the imposed-upon party *has permitted himself* to become servile. He is culpable for his mistaken acquiescence, which has resulted in the diminution of his autonomy.

30. On freedom in this passage, see Asmis 2009, 127; Edwards 2009, 148. See also Edwards's discussion of Letter 80 (pp. 141–142), with respect to metaphorically "buying" oneself out of figurative slavery.

31. Habinek 1992, 195–197, and see chapter 7 below.

32. "*Ipse se appellavit*" is legal and financial: "he summons himself to court," "he sues, or he duns, himself." Griffin (2003, 97–99) lists the ways in which Seneca distinguishes gift from debt in the *De beneficiis*. She points out that although Seneca uses the terminology of credit and debt to discuss benefits, "he is concerned throughout his treatise to distinguish sharply between the two kinds of exchange" (p. 97).

33. Seneca likewise stresses the voluntary nature of gift exchange elsewhere—e.g., at *Ben.* 1.4.3 (ed. Hosius 1900): "We must be taught to give freely, to receive gifts freely, freely to give in return and to set before ourselves the great challenge that those to whom we are obligated, we not only equal, in giving and in generosity of spirit, but we surpass them, since he who ought to repay a favor never matches it unless he overtakes it. The givers must be taught to expect nothing, the receivers, to be indebted for a greater sum." (*nihil imputare, illi plus debere. docendi sunt <libenter dare>, libenter accipere, libenter reddere et magnum ipsis certamen proponere, eos, quibus obligati sunt, re animoque non tantum aequare sed vincere, quia, qui referre gratiam debet, numquam consequitur, nisi praecessit; hi docendi sunt nihil imputare, illi plus debere.*)

34. Seneca does occasionally receive some potential payment from Lucilius. His poetry is quoted twice at *Ep.* 8.9, and Seneca praises a *libellus* of unspecified content extensively in *Ep.* 46 (discussed in chapter 7). The conclusion of *Ep.* 8 is especially interesting in this context. Seneca writes that he will not "bill" Lucilius for a quote, since it



is from Lucilius's own stock: "Hoc non inputo in solutum: de tuo tibi" (8.10). For once, Seneca represents himself as Lucilius's creditor, rather than his debtor. To my mind, this inconsistency has the effect of stressing the artificiality of the overall equation, an effect, and an equation, that Seneca has deliberately contrived.

35. E.g., the promise to Lucilius of immortality through their correspondence (*Ep.* 21.3–6).

36. *Ep.* 45.4: "tu illos sic lege tamquam verum quaeram adhuc, non sciam, et contumaciter quaeram."

37. Graver 1996, 170–173.

38. As Wilson (2001, 181) notes, "It is difficult to read this [passage] without inferring that it is also meant to apply to the *Epistles* themselves."

39. *Ep.* 33.7: "Take command and say something that may be passed down; offer something from your own stock." (*impera et dic quod memoriae tradatur, aliquid et de tuo profer.*)

40. The phrase *commercium epistularum* comes from the first sentence of Letter 38, where Seneca begins, "Deservedly you ask that we step up the rate of our letter exchange." (*Merito exigit ut hoc inter nos epistularum commercium frequentemus.*)

Chapter 6. Rehabilitating Friendship

1. Discussions of friendship in the *Moral Epistles* include Cancik 1967, 61–64, which focuses on Letters 3, 6, and 9; Schönegg 1999, 33–39, which features Letters 6 and 48; Reydam-Schils 2005, 75–77, on friendships between the wise in Letters 9 and 109; and Graver 2007, 182–185, on Letter 9.

2. Blundell 1989; Price 1989; Schofield 1999, 82–99. On Stoic friendship specifically, see Leses 1993; Reydam-Schils 2005; Graver 2007.

3. For Epicurus on friendship, see Long 1986, 71–72; 2006, 189–193. For philosophical instruction through letters, see, briefly, Stowers 1986, 36–40.

4. On instrumentality and the intrinsic good of friendship for the Stoics, see Graver 2007, 181.

5. These modes of friendship were not mutually exclusive and were frequently coextensive, as Griffin (2003, 92–97) points out.

6. E.g., *Fam.* 3.13.2, discussed in chapter 1.

7. *Cic. Amic.* 23: "And so truly, he who gazes on a friend, gazes on a kind of model for himself." (*Verum etiam amicum qui intuetur, tamquam exemplar aliquod intuetur sui.*)

8. Atticus was certainly interested in politics, although he did not pursue a public career. Because his political activities were informal, they did not threaten his friendship with Cicero, but as Leach (1993) has argued (cited in the Introduction, above), neither did they provide the kind of public cooperation that ideal friendship, according to Cicero's *De amicitia*, requires.

9. Seneca offers to interpret Lucilius's term by means of a euphemism drawn from the world of Ciceronian politics. In Seneca's own time, when magisterial elections were long defunct, this euphemistic fiction was double. See the discussion of Letter 118.1–2 in chapter 5.

10. *Ep.* 3.2: "If you account someone a friend in whom you do not trust as greatly as in yourself, you are gravely mistaken, and you do not understand the force of true

friendship” (si aliquem amicum existimas cui non tantundem credis quantum tibi, vehementer erras et non satis nosti vim verae amicitiae).

11. On the internal consistency of Letter 6, particularly the harmony of its beginning and ending, see Richardson-Hay 2006, 229–230.

12. For mirroring and other scopic elements of Seneca’s thought and expression, see, e.g., Abel 1989; Bartsch 2006; Ker 2009b, 180–181, 183.

13. I take “the sort [of friendship] with which men die” (cum qua homines moriuntur) to indicate a friendship that endures for a whole lifetime. At Cic. *Amic.* 33, Scipio asserts the rarity of lifelong friendship.

14. Richardson-Hay (2006, 40–41) demonstrates extensive verbal associations between these two letters.

15. Wilson’s reading of Letter 27 supports this conclusion (2001, 174–179). He summarizes the letter’s main point as “you cannot, in philosophy, deputize others to think for you” (p. 175) and remarks that in using the therapeutic metaphor, Seneca goes out of his way to avoid the “dominating authority” (p. 177) that a purely hortatory or pedagogical mode would entail.

16. For the possibility of merely apparent affirmations, note the textual associations of *emendari* and *argumentum* in Letter 6.1, quoted above, as well as *correxisti* in 27.1. These terms have encouraged at least one scholar (Too 1994, 217) to read Letter 6 as presenting “the soul as narrative” and the persona of Seneca as a purely textual construction, fully detached from the collection’s author. I discuss the extent to which Seneca the author markedly separates himself from “Seneca” the persona in chapter 7. On Too’s reading of the *Moral Epistles* as a pedagogical project overall, see the objections of Wilson 2001, 171–173.

17. Graver 2007, 184.

18. *Ibid.*, 183. On this defense, see also Reydam-Schils 2005, 76, which contends that the individual identity of friends lost to death does matter, and that they will be cherished in memory even by the wise. See further my discussion of Letter 63 in chapter 8.

19. This is how I understand Graver’s reading of the Phidias comparison (2007, 184). If Seneca is making a more limited comparison about *befriending*—that is, the initiation of friendship rather than ongoing friendship—then the wise man’s monopolization of agency is far less objectionable. See *ibid.*, 180–181, for the possible Stoic emphasis on “being a friend rather than having a friend.”

20. On the reader’s role in the *Moral Epistles*, see chapter 5. At Letter 81.11–13, Seneca defends the assertions that “only the wise man knows how to love, only the wise man is a friend” in tandem with the assertion that “only the wise man knows how to return a favor” by explaining that “it is a part of love and friendship to return favors.” (Atqui et amoris et amicitiae pars est referre gratiam.)

21. Cf. Letter 109, which asserts that the wise benefit one another, and furthermore states that “the wise person is not able to maintain his mental disposition unless he keeps company with some friends similar to himself, with whom he may share his virtues” (sapiens non potest in habitu mentis suae stare nisi amicos aliquos similes sui admittit cum quibus virtutes suas communicet, 109.9).

22. A letter from Caesar, for example, Cicero figures as a witness (*testis*) and guarantor (*sponsor*) (*Fam.* 7.5.2 [26]). For this and other epistolary personifications, see chapter 1.

23. Note the first-person verb *exulto* in first position here. The verb occurs elsewhere in the collection only at Letter 34.1 (“cresco et exulto”), discussed in chapter 7.



24. These two verbs are paired (“promitto et spondeo”) when Cicero makes his guarantee of the gratitude that the recommended party will bear to his addressee, their potential benefactor, at *Fam.* 13.9 [139], discussed in chapter 4. See also Cicero’s pledge at *Cael.* 77.

25. The emphatic compound verb phrase “oro et obsecro” is used by the exiled Cicero in a dramatic plea for Atticus’s witness, sympathy, and assistance: “Te oro et obsecro, T. Pomponi” (*Att.* 3.19.3 [64]).

26. Similarly, see *Ep.* 6.6: “I summon you not only for this reason, namely, that you make progress, but also so you will benefit [me]; for we may contribute a great deal, one to another.” (Nec in hoc te accerso tantum, ut proficias, sed ut prosis; plurimum enim alter alteri conferemus.)

27. On solitary dining as evidence of savagery, see Braund 1996.

28. For correct choice as a manifestation of virtue, see Letter 31.6: “The prudent man and artist [of living] will reject or choose each thing according to the occasion, if only his mind is great and unfettered.” (Ille prudens atque artifex pro tempore quaeque repellat aut eliget . . . si modo magnus illi et invictus animus est.)

29. I suspect that the absence of other participants in the correspondence contributes significantly to the artificial feel of the collection. *Tabellarius* occurs as a noun (“letter-carrier”) in Cicero, but is adjectival on its only appearance in the *Moral Epistles*. At 77.1 Seneca notes that the *Alexandrinae naves*, the vessels that herald the arrival of the fleet, are called “messenger ships” (“tabellarias vocant”). Letter 50, exceptionally, mentions the letter’s bearer in its first lines (“qui adferebat”), in connection with the common epistolary trope with which Seneca begins, a comment on the long delay between the letter’s writing and its delivery.

30. See also Letter 43.3–4: “Moreover, judge yourself to be happy when you are able to live in public, when your house walls cover you but do not hide you.” (Tunc autem felicem esse te iudica cum poteris in publico vivere, cum te parietes tui tegent, non abscondent.)

31. Making the act of choosing (a friend) the demonstration of virtue leads inevitably to a paradox: as virtue grows, the outcome of that choice may matter less and less. For the wise man, anyone will do. Conversely, the ordinary person, for whom the right selection of a friend is most critical, is the least equipped to select rightly.

32. The idea is repeated at *Ep.* 48.3: “He who has much in common with his fellow human has all things in common with a friend” (omnia enim cum amico communia habebit, qui multa cum homine).

Chapter 7. Redefining Identity

1. On Lucilius’s background and career, see Griffin 1992, 91, with references; on Lucilius as addressee of the *Moral Epistles*, *ibid.*, 347. Of course, the Lucilius to whom the *Natural Questions* and *On Providence* are dedicated is no less a product of literary portrayal than Lucilius in the letters.

2. For Cicero treating a letter as if it were a person, see *Fam.* 3.11.1–2 [64], discussed in chapter 1.

3. I am ignoring the purely formulaic epistolary salutation *SENECA LUCILIO SUO SALUTEM*. Although it occurs in the medieval manuscripts of the *Moral Epistles* as the

header for each new letter, it is as easy for a reader to ignore as it would be for a copyist to supply.

4. *Ep.* 29.10: “ultimam . . . pensionem . . . quod debeo inpingam.” On the cessation of figurative payments, see Maurach 1970, 129; Russell 1974, 78.

5. On Letter 30 as significant for both thematic closure and continuity, see also Hachmann 1995, 212–219.

6. Seneca proposes the central importance of learning to die well, using himself as an exemplum more directly in Book 6: e.g., “I write this letter to you in this frame of mind, as if death may call me away even as I am writing; I am ready to depart.” (Hoc animo tibi hanc epistulam scribo, tamquam me cum maxime scribentem mors evocatura sit; paratus exire sum, 61.2.) For self-exemplification in Letters 53–57, see Berno 2006; for Letters 60–62, see Maurach 1970, 11–19. On dying well as the preeminent lesson of the Senecan corpus, see Ker 2009a.

7. Compare the opening of Letter 19, discussed in chapter 6, where Seneca’s letters personified act as a sponsor for Lucilius. On the necessity of having a reporter in exemplary discourse, see Roller 2004, 5; Wilcox 2006, 90–91.

8. *Ep.* 6.5: “The spoken word and living together benefit more than public speech.” (Plus . . . et viva vox et convictus quam oratio proderit.) On the primacy of personal contact with a teacher for philosophical improvement, see Graver 1996, 56–59.

9. On the illusion of presence created by a letter, De Pretis 2003, 139, quotes Altman 1982, 19, on “the letter as lover” and “metonymy of the self.” For a fuller exploration of the libidinal dimension of letters between Roman men, see Gunderson 1997 and chapter 3 above. This rhetorical and pedagogical stratagem is admittedly flawed, for the Stoic, because it relies on the reader’s continuing to seek pleasure (*voluptas*) instead of permanent and unchanging joy (*gaudium*). As a moral teacher, however, Seneca is a pragmatist. He writes for ordinary moral agents, not for the wise, and attests to his own pleasure (*voluptas*) in correspondence at the opening of Letter 45.

10. Graver 1996, 165–178; Wilson 2001, 179–186; and see chapter 5 above.

11. Nussbaum (1994, 430) has characterized the collection as “one long rich exemplum.” Interestingly, the middle books are also particularly rich in exempla, a feature that seems to parallel the frequency of “gifts” and “debts” in individual letters within the earlier books.

12. Altman 1982, 186.

13. Saylor (2002), writing about this letter, argues that maintaining friendship in the physical absence of the friend is a self-improving mental exercise. Henderson (2004, 90–91) suggests that Seneca’s endorsement of the mind as the locus of tranquility evokes a letter of recommendation, as well as “commend[ing] correspondence” more generally.

14. *OLD*, s.v. *codicillus* 2b; see also White 2010, 64.

15. On the epistolarity of Letter 33 and its place within the collection, see Wilson 2001, 179–186.

16. *Ibid.*, 182.

17. After an affectionate vocative in Letter 32 (“Propera ergo, Lucili carissime,” 32.3), Lucilius’s name disappears and does not reoccur until the last letter of Book 4 (“Ita dico, Lucili,” 41.2).

18. *OLD*, s.v. *opus* 8, 9, 10.



19. In fact, as the book becomes a monument to its author, in a sense he comes to depend on it for his continued existence (Dupont 1997, 58).

20. *OLD*, s.v. *asserō* 2.

21. On *inieceris*, see Hijmans 1976, 135–36, and n. 21; for commentary on *manus iniectio* (Gai. *Inst.* 4.21–25), see Zulueta 1946, part 2, pp. 242–47. See Ker 2009a, 157–161, on Seneca's emphasis in Letter 1 on Lucilius's relationship to time.

22. Slaves threatened with or subjected to the goad: Plaut. *Curc.* 131, *Men.* 951; Cic. *Phil.* 2.86.

23. Graver (2007, 178–182) and Reydam-Schils (2005, 69–75) discuss mutual benefit among the wise.

24. Translated by J. G. F. Powell.

25. *Benevolentia* occurs only at *Ep.* 81.25, a letter that Seneca positions (at 81.3) as an appendix of sorts to his dialogue “On Benefits” (*De beneficiis*). For *benevolentia* in the *Ad familiares*, see Hall 2009, 203–204, and note its frequent occurrence in letters treated in Part One of this book—e.g., *Fam.* 1.9 (compared with *pietas*), 5.16 (a consolation for bereavement), 6.3 and 6.4 (political consolations), 7.5 and 13.60 (recommendations).

26. *Ep.* 81.8: “The wise person alone knows what value to place on each thing. For the foolish man makes a return that is either less than he owes, or at the wrong time or place; he pours out and casts away what ought to be returned.” (Uni sapienti notum est quanti res quaeque taxanda sit. Nam ille . . . stultus, etiam si bonae voluntatis est, aut minus quam debet aut <alio quam debet> tempore aut quo non debet loco reddit; id quod referendum est effundit atque abicit.)

27. “Constes tibi” is not easy to translate. We might say “settle accounts with yourself” to reflect the financial aspect of the verb, but ideally we would also evoke its relation to *constantia* and thus to the injunction to preserve consistency, congruity, and integrity that Seneca had made in the previous letter (“inter se congruant ac respondeant sibi et una forma percussa sint,” *Ep.* 34.4), and will make again in the second half of Letter 35.

28. First at *Ep.* 35.2: “and however much of my strength has been sapped by age, it will return to me from your youth” (quidquid aetati meae vigoris abscessit, id ad me ex tua, . . . rediturum). On father / son, *senex* / *iuvenis*, rhetorical coding in ancient letters, see Ebbeler 2007, 304–305.

29. As Winterbottom (1972, 224) notes, “[Lucilius] appears fifty-seven times before the end of the seventh book, only thirty-five times in the remaining thirteen extant books.”

30. Letter 77's exemplarity includes self-exemplification. The first part of *Ep.* 77 records Seneca's detachment from everyday events: “for some time now I have acquired nothing nor lost anything . . . no life is incomplete, if it is honorable. Wherever you leave off, if you do so well, your life is whole.” (olim iam nec perit quicquam mihi nec adquiritur. . . . vita non est imperfecta si honesta est; ubicumque desines, si bene desines, tota est, 77.3–4.)

31. Cicero and Trebonius's literary exchange, discussed in chapter 3, provides one of several comparable exchanges.

32. Inwood suggests (2005, 200) that literary ambition led Seneca to address an array of centrally important Stoic themes in a meteorological treatise, so as to set himself “a challenge worthy of his considerable rhetorical talents.” On Seneca's cultivation of versatility as a bid for excellence, see Ker 2006.

33. The reader begins with the whole unread scroll in his right hand and gradually transfers it to his left.

34. Viz. *ingenium*, *animus*, even *impetus*. *Tenor* is more of a stretch, but see Habinek (1992, 197), who translates “endurance,” and Graver (1998, 623), who translates a “steady state” and associates it with Stoic *tonos*, a positive state of tension in the wise person’s soul.

35. The writings of former Stoics were similarly characterized as *virilis* at *Ep.* 33.1, discussed above in this chapter.

36. Or compare *istos*, referring to the “friends” of Lucilius’s anonymous friend at *Ep.* 36.1, discussed above.

37. By praising Lucilius’s work on exclusively stylistic grounds, Seneca appears to fall into the error he has warned of in the previous letter, thus undermining a reader’s natural assumption that that author Seneca will always read correctly (i.e., authoritatively). An attentive reader may be reminded by this tactic of the need to read independently of the viewpoint espoused by “Seneca” in the text.

38. Wilson (1987, 107) remarks on the fuller development of this principle in *Ep.* 114. On that letter, see Graver 1998.

Chapter 8. Consolation and Community

1. For chronology of the consolatory works, see Griffin 1992, 396–398. On the *Ad Marciam*, see also Bellemore 1992.

2. Abel 1967, 70–96; Griffin 1992, 61.

3. Seneca remarks on the novelty of his endeavor at *Helv.* 1.2. On Seneca’s consolations to Marcia and Helvia, see Wilcox 2006. For the innovation of acting as consoler when one is oneself the cause of grief, see the discussion of Letter 63 below. Cicero preceded Seneca in combining two out of three positions, in his case consoler and consoled, in the *Consolatio* he composed after the death of Tullia (*Att.* 12.20.2 [258]), a work now lost but noted by St. Jerome (*Ep.* 60.5).

4. Cf. Maurach 1970, 130.

5. Ker 2009a, 340.

6. For philosophical commentary on Letter 58, see Inwood 2007b, 110–136.

7. On the political aspect of overliving, see Wilson 2004, 88–90.

8. Schöneegg (1999, 104–105) suggests this pun on *exeo*; Inwood (2007b, 136) notes it. Of course, because *vale* means both “good-bye” and also, literally, “be healthy,” the repetition of *vale* marks an additional pun, made more pointed by its juxtaposition to talk of “undiluted death” (“mortes meras”). Seneca may be making another little joke, to wit: “There is more left to say, Lucilius, so be well, in order that you may survive to read my next letter!”

9. See *Ep.* 77.6, where an anonymous “Stoic friend of ours” (*amicus noster Stoicus*) counsels Tullius Marcellinus on the insignificance of continuing to live and the importance of dying well. On Letter 77, see Wilson 2004, 92–98. With reference specifically to suicide as a means of making a good end, see Ker’s discussion of Letter 70 (2009a, 250–254).

10. On the decadent version of *meditatio mortis*, see Edwards 2007, 172–176; on Letter 12 and dying properly, see Mann 2006. For analysis of *De ira* 3.36, which describes



the daily ritual of *recognitio sui* or self-examination to which Letter 12 may refer, see Ker 2009b.

11. Thrasea committed suicide after the death of Seneca, and thus after the composition of the *Moral Epistles*. The attendance of a philosopher at the well-meditated and well-orchestrated death was typical (see, e.g. Sen. *Tranq.* 14.9), but the presence at Thrasea's death of Demetrius specifically, already named by Seneca as an exemplary figure in Letter 62, may well be of special significance.

12. On the *beneficia fortunae*: according to the *De beneficiis*, a slave can perform a benefit for his owner by any service he performs freely (*voluntate*) rather than by command (*imperio*, Ben. 3.21). We might ask whether it is likewise possible to make a return on a gift of fortune, and answer, probably not, since everyone but the wise man is subject to fortune's power. Only he is free, and that freedom is usually expressed as a complete severing of a bond, not a continuing relationship of give and take on equal terms. This irreparable inequity lends additional urgency to the task of "emancipating" oneself from fortune's "domination." On Seneca's depiction of human enslavement to fortune, see Asmis 2009.

13. The wise person's mastery of time is remarked at *De brevitate vitae* 6.4 and 15.5; on mastery of time in the *Moral Epistles*, see Ker 2009a, 159–160. For unnatural control of time, see Schiesaro 2003, 214–217, on Letter 122 and the tragedies.

14. For Cicero's reply to Servius, see Wilcox 2005a and chapter 2. On the interrelationship of honor and shame, and being seen as essential to both emotions, see Barton 2002; Kaster 2005.

15. I have preserved Seneca's economy of phrase here, but I take him to mean that no one manifests, or performs, the signs of sadness purely for his own company: the completely solitary person would not weep. The integral role of others in the constitution and experience of individual emotion presumed here may well strike a modern reader as bizarre, but it is consistent with the social-cognitive basis of other Roman emotions as demonstrated by Kaster 2005.

16. Ker 2009a, 109: "After addressing works to [Annaeus] Serenus prior to his death . . . he addressed his final works to Lucilius." Thus Seneca's own grief for the death of Serenus is mediated "through the narrative of a new literary friendship" with Lucilius.

17. Seneca also died in the company of friends; on the social character of his death, see Ker 2009a, 260; Griffin 1986, 66. For suicide cross-culturally, see Van Hooff 1990, 131. On Seneca's suicide as a "moral witness," see Hill 2004, 152.

18. Powell 1990 on *Amic. ad loc.* comments that the notion of the dead living on in the memory of their surviving friends was a commonplace, citing, e.g., Simonides *epig.* 121 Diehl (= *Anth. Pal.* 7.251). For Stoic friendship and the community of the wise, see Diog. Laert. 7.124; Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.7.111; Reydam's-Schils 2005, 75; Graver 2007, 178–182.

19. *Ep.* 109 *passim*. E.g., 109.5: "One wise person brings joy to another, and strengthens his self-reliance, and the sight of their shared tranquility increases the happiness of both." (*Gaudium illi adferet, fiduciam confirmabit; ex conspectu mutuae tranquillitatis crescet utriusque laetitia*). 109.13: "For one wise man to discover another is an advantageous thing in itself, since by nature every good thing is dear to a good man, and if anyone is connected to the good, for this reason it is connected to himself." (*Invenire enim sapientem sapienti per se res expetenda est, quia natura bonum omne carum est bono et sic quisque conciliatur bono quemadmodum sibi.*)

20. Graver (2009, 248–250) clarifies Seneca's rejection of the Epicurean position,

implicit here but elaborated at *Ep.* 99.25–26, and also held by his teacher Attalus (*Ep.* 63.5–6), that grief itself holds an element of pleasure.

21. Similarly, Reydams-Schils (2005, 81) concludes, “There is an important sense in which the Stoic’s spouse, children, kin, friends and indeed all her fellow human beings will always be with her.”

22. Letter 64.1–4 recounts an example of this procedure.

23. Griffin 1992, 253–254.

24. Ker (2009a, 259) notes that the doctor who administered the hemlock at Seneca’s death was Statius Annaeus, who may well have been a freedman of Seneca and thus legally conceived as a sort of extension of or proxy for his master; his role as healer of Seneca’s final disease resonates as a paradoxical, simultaneous assertion and contradiction of the autonomy Seneca exercises in his death.



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By viewing letters and the practice of correspondence as a species of gift exchange, Wilcox provides a nuanced analysis of neglected and misunderstood aspects of Roman epistolary rhetoric and the social dynamics of friendship in Cicero's correspondence. Turning to Seneca, she shows that he both inherited and reacted against Cicero's euphemistic rhetoric and social practices, and she analyzes how Seneca transformed the rhetoric of his own letters from an instrument of social negotiation into an idiom for ethical philosophy and self-reflection. Though Cicero and Seneca are often viewed as a study in contrasts, Wilcox extensively compares their letters, underscoring Cicero's significant influence on Seneca as a prose stylist, philosopher, and public figure.

"The letter collections of Cicero and Seneca have rarely been considered in concert, a consideration crucial to furthering our understanding of ancient epistolography, epistolarity, and ancient literary gift-giving as a whole. Wilcox's focus on letters as a sort of gift is an important, smart, and valuable one."—Sarah Culpepper Stroup, University of Washington

"Wilcox describes a 'logic of practice' for Roman letter-writing, reveals the contests and strategies at play in Cicero's exchanges with his friends, and demonstrates that Seneca created his new genre of 'moral letters' through a brilliant short-circuiting of the forms and values of the epistolary system."—James Ker, author of *The Death of Seneca*

AMANDA WILCOX is assistant professor of classics at Williams College in Massachusetts. She specializes in late republican and early imperial Latin prose, with interests in epistolography, ethics, and representations of grief and friendship.

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